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A Survey of American attitudes about working women, 1920-1950

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A SURVEY OF AMERICAN ATTITUDES ABOUT WORKING WOMEN: 1920-1950

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ABSTRACT

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN ATTITUDES
ABOUT WORKING WOMEN: 1920-1950

by Judith M. Chavez

This thesis addresses the topic of American attitudes about working women in the years 1920 to 1950. It focuses on the effects that women's working experiences in defense plants during World War II had upon people's traditional ideas about "proper" gender roles. In order to determine if changes in values did occur, this study surveys the evidence of popular attitudes found in the popular media of the times and reviews the recorded testimonies of people.

Research reveals that the majority of people remained loyal to traditional attitudes about home-centered roles for women after the war. However, World War II marked the beginning of an economic prosperity which raised Americans' standard of living and women's expectations. This caused a significant change in women's attitudes about traditional restraints. Daughters were encouraged to expand their horizons and told it was "proper" to dream of a life beyond the walls of their homes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Since World War II the specter of "Rosie the Riveter" has haunted feminists, for it was during the four war years when millions of women proved that females could not only take on, but master most of the "men's" jobs which did not require brute strength. The war years also demonstrated how quickly dynamic changes could be made whenever the government, industry, and the public cooperated in the attainment of a mutual goal. Seemingly overnight whole industries were converted from civilian to war materials production, and when the men who worked in those industries were called into the military, the government unhesitatingly swept aside traditional barriers in order to fill their vacated positions with women and minorities. Winning the war, not sexual or racial equality, was the government's goal, but most feminists believe that the wartime situation offered a unique opportunity for substantial changes in accepted attitudes about working women. Their capabilities surprised their male co-workers, the government and the public cheered their successes, and women themselves expressed pride in their accomplishments. Yet once the war was won, none of the collective or personal achievements of these women seemed to have inspired new attitudes about what constituted "proper" gender roles. Women workers evaporated from the employee rosters of durable goods industries, and the popular media switched from praising "Rosie" to extolling the virtues of marriage, motherhood and housekeeping. What happened to the millions of women who were exposed to the masculine world of work during the four years of World War II? Was it possible that no one, either male or female, was permanently

affected by the successful performances of women in the war production plants? Many feminists have reluctantly concluded just that, and they have denied that the wartime aberration from traditional views on gender roles represented a "watershed" in the history of American women.

Was the tough woman war worker only as substantial as her media symbol "Rosie the Riveter," or did more than a few carry away the seeds of new perspectives when they left the "man's" world of employment? America's swift return to traditional patterns of thought and behavior during the 1950s provided strong evidence that people were entirely unaffected by women's wartime feats. Yet there was still the sudden explosion of feminist activism during the 1960s to be explained. Where did the female activists' determination to make revolutionary alterations in the sexual status quo come from? The dramatic outburst which took place during the 1960s suggested that women had been repressing a gradually building discontent over many years, but is there any historical evidence to support that idea?

This study will attempt to answer this question by surveying the available sources on American attitudes and behavior for the years 1920 through 1950. These include the studies of social and behavioral scientists, political scientists and historians, newspaper and magazine articles, popular books and films, and public opinion polls.

CHAPTER I

ROSIE THE RIVETER

What was the average female war production worker like? Popular wartime portraits of "Rosie the Riveter" invariably pictured her as being young, single, white, and middle-class. She was new to the world of paid employment, undertook "men's" occupations purely out of patriotic duty, and understood that her job would last only as long as she was needed for the war effort. This image was neat and simple, but it was also far from realistic, as government and independent survey evidence revealed.

In 1946, the U.S. Labor Department Women's Bureau conducted a comprehensive survey of 13,000 female workers in ten major war production areas of the nation. Among its many illuminating disclosures was the fact that 50 percent of these women were not new to the labor force, and at least 30 percent had worked for as long as ten years before Pearl Harbor.[1] From the time of the Civil War women had entered the labor force in increasing numbers, and by the 1920s they represented the majority of those employed as professionals in nursing and teaching, service providers in clerical, retail sales, restaurant,laundry and domestic occupations, and factory workers in nondurable goods industries.[2] By 1940, women comprised 25 percent of the total civilian work force, when

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[1]From Bulletin 209, cited in Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 19.

[2]Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 108-41.

fourteen million women were in paid employment. A small 8.6 percent of these women had acquired positions in the male-dominated durable goods industries before the war.[3] However, none of these occupations offered either good wages or opportunities for growth and advancement. When the government called on women to fill the empty positions left by men entering military service, many of them fled their low-paying, low-status jobs for the promises of new positions and better salaries in the war production industries.[4]

Between July 1940 and the close of the war in August 1945, the number of employed females, fourteen years of age and older, increased by some five million. U.S. Department of Labor statistics showed that around nineteen million women were employed by the wartime peak in November 1943, representing 36 percent of the total labor force. Out of these, at least two million women went to work in durable goods industries, comprising a first-time high of 25 percent of all their workers in October 1944.[5] Not all of these "new" durable goods production workers came from other segments of the labor force, however. The U.S. Census counted at least three million unemployed females in 1940, and it was probable that many of these women jumped at the opportunity to work in the defense plants.[6] Female students, aged fourteen through nineteen, comprised one out of five defense workers by 1944, and 14 percent of the female labor force in

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[3]Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon, "Women Workers and Recent Economic Change," *Monthly Labor Review* 65 (December 1947): 666.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Kessler-Harris, 276.

1945.[7] After these immediate sources of labor had been tapped, housewives were called upon to fill the remaining openings as new war workers.

In 1940, almost three-fifths of the supply of women who were not in the labor force were thirty-five years of age and older, and more than two-thirds of these were forty-five years or older.[8] By 1946, women over thirty-five accounted for 60 percent of the total increase of female workers during the war. At the same time, the number of employed married women increased by two million, constituting 75 percent of the new female workers. World War II was significant in that it marked the first time in history that older, married women outnumbered young single women in the female work force.[9] The Women's Bureau survey of ten war production areas also showed that only 32 percent of the women workers who were married, widowed, or divorced had children under fourteen years of age, and over half of those had only one child.[10] Women in the primary childbearing years between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four increased their portion of the total labor force by a mere one-half of 1 percent during the war.[11]

It appeared from these statistics that "Rosie," or rather the average new war worker, was most likely to have been thirty-five years of age and older and married, but was she exclusively white or middle class? In 1940, two million

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[7]Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 12.; Pidgeon, 669.

[8]Pidgeon, 667.

[9]Ibid., 668.; Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sexroles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 4, 5.

[10]Anderson, 4, 5.

[11]Ibid.

women comprising one out of five female wage earners, worked as household servants. African-American and Hispanic women made up half of this domestic work force.[12] When the wartime labor shortages exposed discriminatory hiring practices as a harmful impediment to full production, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, outlawing such practices by defense contractors. At the same time, he also established the Committee on Fair Employment Practices (FEPC) in June of 1941.[13] In response, African-American and Hispanic women eagerly applied for war production jobs, and were able to squeeze through grudgingly small and short-lived openings into previously unattainable jobs.[14]

Throughout the war, a stubborn reluctance to hire minorities persisted among war production employers. Despite the government's efforts to get women into vital production industries, however, federal agencies actually exerted a minimum of effort to insure that women in general, and minority women in particular, received their fair share of good jobs and promotional opportunities once they were employed.[15] Instead, government and industry counselors encouraged minority women to enter "war service" by filling those jobs which white women had quickly vacated in laundries, restaurants and domestic work.[16] It was only with the aid of such organizations as the National Council of Negro

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[12]Kessler-Harris, 270.

[13]Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 233.

[14]Ibid., 235-37.

[15]Ibid., 238-39.

[16]Ibid., 237-38.

Women, that African-American women were able to challenge and overcome discriminatory barriers, and many achieved positions in the "white" world of durable goods production.[17]

As a result of their persistence, the 1946 Women's Bureau survey found that African-American women held a large percentage of jobs in the Southern war plants where their numbers were greatest. Almost one-third of the women employed in Mobile, Alabama were African-American, while in four other areas of the nation they comprised between 10 and 19 percent of female employees. In the remaining five areas, less than 10 percent of the women were African-American or other "non-white" races.[18] Many African-American women did indeed fill the service jobs left by white women, because their participation rate in domestic service increased from 47 percent in 1940, to 60 percent by 1944.[19] However, a large number of African-American women also took the wartime opportunity to flee farm labor forever. Between 1940 and 1944, the percentage of all African-American women who worked on farms decreased by almost one-half, from 16 percent to 8 percent, and most did not return after the war.[20] During this shifting of the wartime working population, some evidence showed that Hispanic women were also able to make a move from farm labor into office and war production positions.

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[17]Kessler-Harris, 279.

[18]Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon and Susan Reverby, eds. *America's Working Women* (New York: Random House, 1976), 311.

[19]Jones, 237.

[20]Chester W. Gregory, *Women in Defense Work During W.W. II: An Analysis of the Labor Problem and Women's Rights* (New York: Exposition Press, Inc., 1974), 142.

Finding statistical evidence on the labor force participation rates of Hispanic women during World War II was almost impossible. The U.S. Census Bureau struggled through many years of creative formulas to count the diverse group of people generally classified today as Hispanic. The problem arose from the fact that many Hispanic people were aliens who lived and worked in the United States for varying amounts of time. Others eventually remained in the U.S. as naturalized citizens, but their diversity defied simplified methods for either classifying or enumerating them. Neither national nor racial origin, nor language designations proved effective in the government's efforts to label and count Hispanics.[21] As a solution, the U.S. Census Bureau usually classified all but African-descended people from Spain, Latin America and the Caribbean as Caucasians.[22] Other government agencies and war production industries also faced this problem, with the result that Hispanic women became "invisible" as far as solid statistical evidence on their labor force participation was concerned. Only first-hand accounts of these women's experiences, as well as recorded comments of those who worked with them attested to their presence in domestic, clerical and durable goods production during the war.[23] Also among those who worked without benefit of formal recognition, were some fifty thousand Japanese-American women interned in west coast relocation camps.[24] Both

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[21]Jose Hernandez, Leobardo Estrada and David Alvirez, "Census Data and the Problem of Conceptually Defining the Mexican American Population," *Social Science Quarterly* 53 (March 1973): 671-87.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Gluck, 71-98, 203-19, 263.

[24]Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 469.

their labor force participation and their plight was ignored during the chaotic wartime conditions.

After a decade of depression, the promises of jobs, and even new lives, set off massive migrations to war production areas. Women followed husbands and boy friends to war production centers, and during the first 3 1/2 years of the war, over seven million women changed their county of residence. A third of these women joined the labor force, and eventually comprised around 50 percent of the female labor force in such war production centers as Mobile, Alabama; San Francisco, California; and Wichita, Kansas.[25]

These facts bring up an important element in the search for "Rosie's" true identity, and that was whether the majority of new war workers were drawn from the middle-class or the working-class. Some clues point to the latter. For instance, the 1946 Women's Bureau survey of ten war production centers found that 54 percent of the women employees had not graduated from high school, and that only 10 percent had attended college. Further, only one-third of these women described themselves as prewar housewives, indicating that most considered employment a necessity and not an option.[26] During the same survey, 75 percent replied that they expected to work after the war, and 90 percent of the 75 percent said they looked forward to continued employment in the same area they had worked in during the war. Asked why they wished to continue working, 84 percent of the 75 percent replied that they were solely responsible for the support of themselves and others. Another 8 percent cited such special reasons as the purchase of a

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[25]William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125.

[26]Honey, 19, 20.

home or sending children to school, and only 8 percent said that they would work because they enjoyed it and the financial independence it provided.[27] Evidently their new positions meant a great deal to the majority of women war workers. Virtually all of the single, widowed or divorced women, and 57 percent of the married women who wanted to work after the war said that their financial needs left them no choice.[28] The urgency was even greater among African-American women. In six of the war production areas, 94 percent or more of these women planned to continue working after the war.[29] However, between July 1945 and April 1946, unemployment rates for nonwhites increased more than twice as fast as among whites.[30]

Beginning as early as August 1944, industries began to lay off large numbers of their women employees, and by 1946 the female labor force had declined from 19,170,000, to 16,896,000 workers. Women's share of the civilian labor force decreased from 35.6 percent in 1944, to 28.6 percent in 1947, and the percentage of all women in the work force dropped from 36.5 percent to 30.8 percent.[31] Eventually women suffered the most extensive cutbacks in manufacturing and heavy industry, precisely those areas where they had made their greatest wartime gains.[32] In the aircraft parts plants where women comprised 42 percent of

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[27]Baxandall, 310-12.

[28]Ibid., 312.

[29]Ibid., 311.

[30]Jones, 257.

[31]Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982): 21.

[32]Ibid.

the total work force, they constituted 60 percent of those laid off. In aircraft engine plants, women were 39 percent of the employees, and 89 percent of the layoffs. Ford Motor Company at Willow Run released 81 percent of their women workers, and the Hoover Company cut 84 percent. American Leather Products, Asbestos Manufacturing Company and Baker Rouland Company, all terminated 100 percent of their female employees.[33] Overall, women, who comprised 60 percent of all workers released from employment in the postwar reconversion period, lost one million positions in durable goods factories. Female workers lost their wartime jobs at a rate that was 75 percent higher than that of men. There was evidence that many of the women who were removed from positions in heavy industry expected to be rehired after reconversion, but that did not happen.[34]

While it was true that many men also lost jobs during the postwar reconversion period, they were rehired at a much higher rate than women.[35] Some women were rehired by their wartime durable goods employer, but they often found that both their former position and pay had been downgraded from their wartime status.[36] The majority of unemployed women flowed back into clerical, sales, and nondurable production jobs, but there were important exceptions. Women did not return to domestic work, or any other of the least desirable service

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[33]Sheila Tobias and Lisa Anderson, "What Happened to Rosie the Riveter?," *Ms.*, June 1973, 93.

[34]Hartmann, 91; Chafe, 159.

[35]Nathan Weinberg "Workers' Experiences During First Phase of Reconversion," *Monthly Labor Review* 62 (May 1946): 707-17.

[36]Ibid.

and manufacturing positions. Women's Bureau surveys found that women were very reluctant to lose either the prestige or the pay that their wartime positions had provided.[37]

Between September 1945 and November 1946, 3.25 million women became unemployed, and almost 2.75 million were hired.[38] Yet despite the shifting of working women from durable goods production to traditional "female" professions, it was nonetheless clear that many others who were employed during the war did not return to the labor force. From the wartime peak of 35.4 percent in 1944, women's share of the total labor force fell to 28.6 percent in 1947, and the proportion of all women in the job market fell from 36.5 percent to 30.8 percent. Women's share of the total labor force did not reach the 36 percent mark again until 1970.[39]

Some observers were hesitant to conclude only negatives from this statistical evidence. For instance, in her 1947 report, Mary Pidgeon, the Chief of the Economic Studies Section of the Women's Bureau, pointed out that even though women's participation rate had dropped by 14 percent between 1944 and 1947, this was still 17 percent above the 1940 average. Later Census Bureau reports showed that the total rate for the 1940-1950 period increased by 14.2 percent, the largest ever for American women.[40] Who were these new women workers?

Valerie Oppenheimer's study, based on the post-World War II increase in women's labor force participation, focused on the group of women who showed the

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[37]Pidgeon, 668-71.

[38]Chafe, 159-60.

[39]Hartmann, 24; Woloch, 543.

[40]Woloch, 543; Pidgeon, 668.

largest wartime increase: the older, married women. She especially emphasized this factor as being historically significant because, while 1940-1960 labor force participation rates for women of all marital statuses had shown increases, those for married women, thirty-five years and older, had been enormous. Statistics showed a 139 percent increase in the proportion of working married women who were between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four, and a 254 percent increase in the employment rate for women between forty-five and fifty-four years of age.[41] Middle-aged, married women had been entering the labor force in larger numbers before World War II, but the overall trend had shown only a slow, gradual increase; however, after the war the yearly rates showed the dramatic gains that Oppenheimer found fascinating. What accounted for the accelerated employment trend among middle-aged, married women, and what had the wartime situation to do with it? Oppenheimer's conclusions, and those of several other interested scholars, have not accepted the theory that women's, or society's change in attitudes about working women caused this particular employment trend. Instead, she and most feminists and historians have argued that it was environmental, not ideological factors which influenced women's decisions about taking employment outside of their homes. Only William Chafe has defied this consensus by asserting that a change in attitudes played a pivotal role in promoting the change in women's labor force participation after World War II.

In his 1972 study, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970,* Chafe stated that despite the persistence of traditional ideas on women's proper gender role, the war marked a "turning point"

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[41]Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, *The Female Labor Force in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1970), 10-15.

in the history of American women. The cornerstone for his conclusion was comprised of one outstanding and indisputable element: "At the turn of the century, the young, the single, and the poor had dominated the female labor force. Fifty years later, the majority of women workers were married and middle-aged, and a substantial minority came from the middle-class."[42] By 1991, and many academic rebuttals later, Chafe maintained his stance in *The Paradox of Change.* After a dutiful recognition of the most convincing refutations of his theory, Chafe nevertheless persisted in his belief that: "the war had provided a critical lever that significantly facilitated the institutionalization of long-term trends and offered a decisive impetus toward legitimizing employment for married women of the middle-class.[43] His conclusion highlighted the fact that it was well-educated, married women from families with moderate to comfortable incomes who comprised the bulk of the newly employed after the war. These women did not need their jobs for the basic essentials of life, unlike the majority of prewar women workers. Therefore, Chafe argued, they worked for nonmaterial reasons, indicating a true change in attitudes.[44] Chafe's critics protested that this evaluation was too optimistic and simplistic.

Most researchers agreed that World War II marked the beginning of an unprecedented upsurge in the number of employed women, but they did not agree that the causes were so readily apparent. In particular, scholars have taken

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[42]William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 195.

[43]Chafe, *Paradox of Change*, 172.

[44]Ibid., 188-89.

a hard look at the experiences of the women who worked at "men's" jobs in the male-dominated durable goods industries during the war. While over two million of the "new" wartime female workers had also streamed into the white collar field, they filled traditionally accepted "women's" jobs, and were unlikely to have promoted revolutionary ideas about women's gender role.[45] Only the average "Rosie the Riveter" had both the opportunity and the motive for a reappraisal of traditional values. These women were also least likely to have left the work force willingly after the war. Most of the war workers were thirty-five years of age and older, and without small children in need of constant attention. There were also many indications that the majority of these women were from the working-class, not the middle-class, at the time of their wartime employment. Included in this category were not only white women, but most of the African-American and Hispanic women workers as well.[46] Other factors showed that the majority of the women working in the durable goods industries during the war wanted, and needed, their jobs; yet female workers disappeared soon after the August 1945 resumption of peace. There are varying theories as to why this happened, and each one emphasizes different causal factors. Knowing who the average wartime worker was is not enough. It is also essential to review prewar social values as well as modern scholarly perspectives in order to form a clearer picture of "Rosie's" personality and working environment. Perhaps then it will be possible to decide whether World War II provided a "catalyst" for a permanent change in attitudes about gender roles, and even more difficult, whether this

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[45]Hartmann, 88.

[46]Rudolfo Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), 236-44; Jones, 268-71.

supposed change had anything to do with the increase in married, middle-aged, middle-class women's postwar labor force participation.

CHAPTER II

THE 1920S

Before it is possible to determine whether or not American beliefs about women's roles were altered by the working experiences of women during World War II, it is first necessary to review prewar attitudes. The subject was quite popular for many years preceding the 1940s, and people were regularly exposed to numerous books, media articles, and public opinion polls which dealt with the "problem" of working women, and in particular, working married women.

Women had been entering the labor force in ever increasing numbers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the slow pace and overall nature of this increase hardly deserved the sort of alarmed response it increasingly drew from male workers and society. During the early 1800s, women were welcomed into factory and mill work under the rationale that the employment of women in manufacturing saved them "from poverty and idleness," and freed men to handle more important work in the skilled crafts and farming. Custom also allowed employers to pay women far less than men were paid for the same work.[1] Even after men began to take up manufacturing jobs in the latter years of the nineteenth century, women continued to enter factory work, but old beliefs concerning "men's" and "women's" work soon shaped strict policies on what types of jobs women and men should do, and how much their labor was worth.

Despite the prevalence of discriminatory gender determinants for

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[1]Woloch, 137.

occupations and wages, five million American women were employed by 1900, and 25 percent of these were in manufacturing. Women represented only 17 percent of the total labor force in durable goods production, but their portion of that segment of the work force was four times greater in 1900 than it had been in 1870. At that time, the average female industry worker was young, white and urban, three-quarters of them were under twenty-five, and three-quarters were foreign-born or daughters of foreign-born parents.[2] African-American women, who were subjected to the added discriminatory practices of racism, were rarely able to break through into manufacturing jobs. Less than 3 percent of all African-American working women were employed in manufacturing in 1900.[3]

The majority of women workers were concentrated in occupations which were nothing more than extensions of household production, and because these jobs required very little knowledge or experience, the women who filled them constituted the bulk of those employed in unskilled and semi-skilled manufacturing jobs. Women were clustered in the garment industries, and they represented 38 percent of those working in tobacco factories. They also predominated in canneries, bookbinderies, twine- and box-making factories, packing plants, and commercial laundries.[4] Women were not hired in the heavy industries such as shipbuilding, construction, foundries, mines, or machine production. They were especially barred from any skilled trade or craft such as typography, welding, molding or electrical work, because the craftsmen who dominated these trades

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[2]Ibid., 235.

[3]Jones, 166-68.

[4]Woloch, 235-36.

feared that cheaper female labor would replace them.[5]

Traditional custom, and the unchecked growth of competitive capitalism, dictated that a woman's labor was not worth the same as a man's. The result was that by 1900, thousands of women labored in dead-end jobs, for subsistence wages, and with little hope of personal advancement. Although male workers also suffered under long hours, dismal working conditions, and safety hazards, they were paid better and were able to improve their situations through the apprenticeship systems that were offered within carefully guarded craft unions.[6] This barrier was persistently buttressed by a continuing line of male workers through the years, and the majority of women were successfully held down in nonthreatening, unskilled or semi-skilled "women's" occupations.

Men were threatened nonetheless. By 1922, H. L. Mencken proclaimed in his satirical work, *In Defense of Women,* that:

> The gradual emancipation of women that has been going on for the last century has still a long way to proceed before they are wholly delivered from their traditional burdens and so stand clear of the oppressions of men. But already, it must be plain, they have made enormous progress--perhaps more than they made in the ten thousand years preceding. The rise of the industrial system, which has borne so harshly upon the race in general, has brought them certain unmistakable benefits. Their economic dependence, though still sufficient to make marriage highly attractive to them, is nevertheless so far broken down that large classes of women are now almost free agents, and quite independent of the favour of men. Most of these women, responding to ideas that are still powerful, are yet intrigued, of course, by marriage, and prefer it to the autonomy that is coming in, but the fact remains that they now have a free choice in the matter, and that dire necessity no longer controls them. After all, they needn't marry if they don't want to; it is possible to get their bread by their own labour in the workshops of the world.[7]

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Kessler-Harris, 171-72.

[7]H. L. Mencken, *In Defense of Women* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1963), 149-50.

Mencken went on to point out that women's increasing economic security was responsible for both the declining marriage and birth rates.[8] His "defense" illustrated several telling characteristics of the growing preoccupation with the "woman problem."

In the first place, though Mencken purported to include all working women in his estimation, he was actually addressing only middle-class working women. Working-class women of the 1920s, most of whom were employed in low-status, low-paying domestic, personal service and unskilled manufacturing jobs, certainly did not qualify as "free agents." Most of the gains that Mencken emphasized were made by white, educated, middle-class women in the decade before World War I. Protective laws and weak unions had effectively limited the possibilities of improvement in the conditions of female industrial workers up to that time.[9] World War I did not alleviate this situation, though more women were able to move into "men's" production jobs during the manpower shortage. The return of peace-time conditions brought the firm reinstatement of the status quo, and women were once again pushed back into traditional "women's" occupations.[10] By 1920, the proportion of women in the labor force remained around the 25 percent mark, but as Mencken's concerned attention indicated, the composition of the female labor force was beginning to take on a new character.[11]

In her study of working women, Alice Kessler-Harris found that during the early part of the twentieth century women workers made up in the white-collar

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[8]Ibid.

[9]Woloch, 388-89.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

areas what they had failed to gain in manufacturing. By 1920, "in a process accelerated by the war but not caused by it," 25.6 percent of all employed women worked in white-collar occupations, compared to 23.8 percent in manufacturing, 18.3 percent in domestic, and 12.9 percent in agriculture.[12]

The dynamic growth of American business and public education expanded the number of "women's" jobs by the turn of the century. Unlike their sisters in manufacturing, women met with less resistance when they entered schools as teachers, or offices as clerical workers, and department stores as retail sales clerks.[13] However, African-American and immigrant women faced discriminatory preferences which prevented all but native-born, educated, white women from interacting with predominantly white, native-born students, business clients, and department store customers.[14] Between 1890 and 1920, white American-born women comprised 90 percent of those who moved into the expanding clerical and professional fields.[15] Kessler-Harris added that within the economic sphere, working women openly acknowledged an existing hierarchy of desirable occupations which was very much class-based. Professional jobs such as nursing and teaching were at the top of the list, with office work and department store clerking following behind. The amount of education required for these jobs clearly distinguished them from the bottom level occupations. Those with little or no education or craft skills became factory workers, waitresses, and domestic

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[12]Kessler-Harris, 224.

[13]Woloch, 245.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 132.

servants, in descending order.[16] Such a development was important, Kessler-Harris said, because it opened a new facet of life to working women. Middle-class women continued to work out of economic necessity just as working-class women did, but the association of status and prestige with paid employment was new. Proud Americans had long believed that a family which sent its women out into the "rough and tumble" of the work world did so only under pressure of dire economic need.[17] But the new white-collar occupations were clean and "feminine." Perhaps because of this factor, teaching, nursing, clerical and sales occupations did not attract male employees or provoke male workers into the vigorous building of occupational barriers that female incursions into the industrial fields prompted. What provoked uneasiness among educated, middle-class observers such as Mencken, was a factor that opened up another part of the debate about working women.

The main complaint Mencken had with the growing force of working women was what he viewed as their threat to the institutions of marriage and motherhood. There was also the implication that falling birthrates among the educated, white, middle-class posed a genuine threat to society. As an ardent admirer of Nietzsche's "Superman" ideal, Mencken spent his life railing against what he considered the ruinous mediocrity of humanity in general, and American democracy in particular.[18] As Kessler-Harris pointed out, Mencken was not alone in this respect. Around 1900 a sprouting eugenics movement began to express concerns

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[16]Kessler-Harris, 128, 135.

[17]Frederick Lewis Allen, *The Big Change: America Transforms Itself 1900-1950* (New York: Bantam Books), 1965, 11, 12.

[18]Mencken, x, xi, 122.

about "race suicide." In particular, devotees of "racial purity" philosophies focused much attention upon the vital role that "superior" mothers played in the perpetuation of a strong and dominant (western European descended) white race.[19] Such fears about the real decline in the national birthrate arose at the same time that unprecedented numbers of immigrants were flowing into the United States. Between 1900 and 1920, nearly fourteen million people arrived in America seeking economic opportunities and homes. Unlike the previous waves of immigrants which were of predominantly western European origins, the vast majority of new arrivals were eastern European Jews and southern European Italians.[20] This sudden, massive influx of "foreigners," so unlike the previous Irish, German and Scandinavian newcomers of the nineteenth century, alarmed native Americans who imagined that the nation was being overwhelmed by strangers. In the minds of many people, "different" was synonymous with "inferior." In his examination of magazines and newspapers from 1900 to 1930, T. J. Woofter, Jr., found that between the years 1907 and 1914 there was a marked increase in public hostility toward immigration. "The undesirability of certain racial elements" became a more prominent subject of discussion in the nation's media.[21] As a result of the general hysteria, the Immigration Act of 1921 was passed in a determined effort to limit future immigration severely, while others increasingly promoted ideologies

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[19]Kessler-Harris, 185.

[20]Woloch, 541; As cited in Charles F. Marden and Gladys Meyer, *Minorities in American Society* (New York: D. Van Norstrand Company, 1978), 63-67.

[21]T. J. Woofter, Jr., *Races and Ethnic Groups in American Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1933), 31.

emphasizing the preservation of a presumed "superior" white race.[22] One result of the debate on "superior" and "inferior" people was that predominantly "foreign" working-class women who filled low-status, low-paying jobs, were dismissed as too "inferior" to merit equality of opportunity or pay, and higher class women were deemed too "superior" to be wasted on socially harmful pursuits like working careers.

Such sentiments fueled the frequent pre-World War I campaigns to regulate women's labor force participation through state and federal protective labor legislation, and a paternalistic perspective began to emphasize a clear distinction between ordinary male laborers and special female laborers. For instance, public sympathies for "protective" policies were evident in the legislation trend up to and following the 1908 U.S. Supreme Court decision to limit working hours in the case of *Muller vs. Oregon.*[23] In that case, Louis Brandeis' entire argument hinged on the assertion that a woman's "special physical organization," or her maternal function, and the need to prevent a "laxity of moral fibre," necessitated the restriction of her working time to ten hours a day.[24] The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Brandeis' client, and in its closing statements formally declared that because "women's physical stature and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage," women needed special protections to ensure the "strength and vigor of the race."[25] Once sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court, legislation designed specifically for women

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[22]Ibid., 66-67.

[23]Kessler-Harris, 185-86.

[24]Ibid., 186-87.

[25]Ibid., 187.

eventually became the means to many ends that proponents never intended.

Working-class women and concerned women's organizations enthusiastically welcomed protective legislation as a defense against exploitative employers and dangerous working environments. Brandeis, and other social reformers, viewed such legal measures as the most effective means for controlling the abuses and inequities inherent in *laissez-faire* capitalism.[26] *Muller vs. Oregon* proved to be the landmark case Brandeis believed it would be, because once the wall had been weakened, government regulation of business became a formidable weapon for those who favored social legislation.[27] Brandeis supported strategic protective legislation as the surest path to a dynamic goal. He envisioned nothing less than the transformation of an inhumane economic and social system. Working-class women and such reform organizations as the National Consumers' League, the National Women's Trade Union League, and the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau embraced tactical protective legislation which alleviated the most immediate needs and sufferings of working women. All sought only to help working women, but once entrenched, their well-intentioned protective measures powerfully reinforced traditional beliefs about women's "innate" weaknesses and inferiority to men.

The *Muller vs. Oregon* case was exceptional for another reason. In his brief, Brandeis included only two pages of "law" and over one hundred of "expert" testimony by scholars and special observers providing evidence to support the conclusion that long hours were physically and morally dangerous for working

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[26]Alpheus Thomas Mason, "The Case of the Overworked Laundress," *Quarrels That Have Shaped the Constitution,* ed. by John A. Garraty (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), 176-90.

[27]Ibid., 183-84.

women. This innovative courtroom method introduced, and legitimized, the use of social and behavioral scientists as reliable sources of social observations.[28]

From that time in the early twentieth century, there was an escalating profusion of writings by "experts" which focused on the "woman problem." Who were these women who stirred up such a storm? Single women had finally been accepted and even encouraged to "earn their keep" by the early twentieth century, but working married women were something else.[29] Between 1900 and 1930, the proportion of married women who entered the labor force doubled, increasing six times as fast as the proportion of single women. By 1920, only 9 percent of all married women were employed, making up 22.8 percent of the female work force, but the proportion of married women who worked in 1930 had jumped to 28.8 percent, which represented an increase of 25 percent.[30] In 1920, five times more African-American wives worked than married women from any other racial or ethnic group. African-American women also represented a disproportionate 33 percent of all women employees throughout the 1920s and 1930s, even though they comprised only around 10 percent of the total female population.[31] Due to persistent discriminatory practices, however, the majority of employed African-American women remained limited to domestic and agricultural jobs. By 1930, only 5.4 percent of all female manufacturing workers were African-American, and they

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[28]Ibid., 181-86.

[29]Lewis, 11.

[30]Kessler-Harris, 229: Cott, 129.

[31]Jones, 162, 166; Lynn Y. Weiner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother: The Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 89.

made up a mere 5 percent of female employees in clerical positions.[32]

With the exception of the large numbers of African-American women, the overall trend of female employment between 1900 and 1930 showed a gradual shifting out of domestic and agricultural jobs into manufacturing and finally into the expanding white-collar sector. In 1900, less than 18 percent of all employed women worked in clerical, sales, managerial and professional fields, but by 1930, their participation rate had grown to 44 percent.[33] However, women did not really "gain" by this advancement out of unskilled manual labor into skilled white-collar occupations. A mid-1920s study by the National Industrial Conference Board showed that by far the majority of all female white-collar workers were concentrated in low-paying, low-status areas of typing, stenography, bookkeeping, cashiering, office machine operation, and salesclerking. Men filled positions such as head bookkeeper, senior cashier, or chief clerk, and their higher pay reflected the distinction.[34] Between 1890 and 1930, the low average wage in clerical work remained unchanged, reflecting the influence of a glutted field. At the least, office work offered a clean and pleasant working environment, but in manufacturing, the working conditions were highly unpleasant and the pay was even worse. In nondurable goods production areas in the 1920s, the average woman's and the average child's wages together equaled less than the average man's pay.[35]

H. L. Mencken asserted that, as wage earners, women were automatically

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[32]Jones, 163-66.

[33]Cott, 131.

[34]Ibid., 133.

[35]Ibid., 131, 133.

transformed into independent agents, but the facts did not support his claim. A Women's Bureau study of twenty-two compiled cases from 1888 through 1923 found that more than 90 percent of the working women investigated contributed all or part of their earnings to family support.[36] This contradicted Mencken's implied portrait of free-wheeling, worldly working women. Even with an education, women's opportunities for growth and advancement were severely restricted.

Due to the growing numbers of women with college educations, their proportion of the professional employment sector grew by 50 percent during the 1920s, when women's participation rate increased from 11.9 percent to 14.2 percent.[37] Besides the traditional fields of teaching and nursing, women began to make inroads as magazine and newspaper editors, reporters, and journalists, and in the business world they were entering real estate, banking, and retail buying. The popular media seemed especially eager to trumpet the "masculine" feats of such "unusual" women pioneers as aviatrix Amelia Earhart. Yet, at the same time, medical schools maintained strict quotas on women entrants, and 90 percent of American hospitals refused to appoint women interns.[38] In 1920, women represented a mere 5 percent of all doctors, 1.4 percent of the lawyers, 30 percent of all college professors and instructors, but 62 percent of the social workers, 88 percent of all librarians, and 96 percent of the nation's nurses.[39] Middle-class professional women were no more "free agents" than working-class women. In fact, their gender-determined occupational distribution

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[36]Ibid., 130.

[37]Woloch, 391, 392.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 546.

in both the professional and service industries indicated that employed women had a substantial way to go before they would pose a threat to working males. However, Mencken and a growing chorus of alarmed social "experts" expressed grave concerns about women's "proper" social role and their increasingly "deviant" behavior.

In one humorous 1921 article entitled "Woman: the Eternal Topic," a writer named Rose MacCaulay asked what all the fuss over women was about. Of late, she stated, contemporary society's singular obsession with the "woman problem" had taken on a hysterical tone. Why, she reasoned, could not women simply be treated as ordinary people--like men?[40] MacCaulay's perspective was an exception.

By 1925, George MacAdam of the *New York Times* proclaimed, "the battle's over, boys. We're licked. Our last sanctuary is gone; women have invaded the smoking-car. How good that old rank atmosphere of undiluted masculinity!" He was disturbed by the new ideas about nongender-specific education for boys and girls. It greatly worried him, he said, that women seemed to be trying to be men. As for himself, his argument remained unchanged from the one he had wielded ten years before against Henrietta Rodman of the Feminist Alliance: "difference is not only desirable, it is essential."[41]
Author D. H. Lawrence echoed these sentiments in a more strident 1929 article entitled "Cocksure Women and Hensure Men." What bothered Lawrence most about the "new woman," he said, was her "dangerous" and "devastating" self-assurance: ". . . she rushes to mad lengths about votes, or welfare, or sports, or

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[40]Rose MacCaulay, "Women: the Eternal Topic," *The Living Age* 310 (17 September 1921): 734-36.

[41]"Hopeless Wails Against the 'New Woman'," *Literary Digest* 84 (17 January 1925): 49-50.

business. She is marvelous, out-manning the man. But alas, it is all fundamentally disconnected. It is all an attitude." It was also a futile endeavor, Lawrence assured the reader, for all of the "new woman's" accomplishments would seem wasted when she realized that she had actually missed out on her true vocation and reward, which was marriage and motherhood.[42] However strained their concerns were, the opinions of these two influential writers were shared by others of the early twentieth century American "intelligentsia."

In 1929, the entire May issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* was dedicated to the subject of "Women in the Modern World." In the foreword, editor Viva Boothe addressed the crux of the controversy. "Much of the confusion in thought over the 'vexed question' of woman's sphere arises . . . because of the general tendency to view the whole range of woman's activities in light of her child-bearing function." However, it was hoped, she added, that people would resist their fears about altering traditional values, and consider new adaptations when customs became outdated and inhibited the progression of human civilization.[43] In the following collection of articles, contributing authors discussed the "problem" of working women, and there was a heightened focus on the propriety of working married women.

The majority of the authors were prominent professional women such as historian Mary Beard; Marguerite M. Wells, a director of the National League of Women Voters; Florence Kelley, General Secretary of the National Consumers'

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[42]D. H. Lawrence, "Cocksure Women and Hensure Men," *Forum*, January 1929), L.

[43]Viva B. Boothe, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 143 (May 1929): vi-viii.

League; and economist Chase Going Woodhouse. All were proud of the progress that educated women had made toward personal and economic independence, and several of them expressed frustration over the fact that women were being held back by persistent discriminatory traditions from even greater accomplishments. Each of these women contributors discussed these traditional barriers, but each also optimistically concluded that conditions for working women could be improved with time, education, and patience. Significantly, none of these women writers offered definitive solutions for the "problem" of working married women, though most discussed the subject.

In an article entitled "Legal and Administrative Restrictions Affecting the Rights of Married Women to Work," Mary Phlegar Smith, a sociologist from the University of North Carolina, took a closer look at some of the "gains" that women had supposedly made over the years. In particular, she focused on the various state laws known as the "Married Women's Acts." Smith pointed out that most of these "emancipating statutes" did not in fact prevent all practices which limited women's freedom. For instance, a late 1920s survey taken by the National Education Association disclosed that 60.1 percent of the schools in 1,532 cities were discriminating against married women teachers. In 25.1 percent of the cities, single teachers were expected to resign immediately upon their marriage, and in another 25.5 percent of cities they were permitted to remain only until the end of the school year.[44] Numerous instances of discrimination against married women could be found in private business as well, and over forty states

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[44]Mary Phlegar Smith, "Legal and Administrative Restrictions Affecting the Rights of Married Women to Work," *Annals* 143 (May 1929): 261-62.

upheld by-laws discriminating against married women.[45] Smith concluded by pointing out that due to behavior ruled by tradition and custom, "the gainfully employed married woman continues to be regarded by no small group of persons as an 'enemy of society,'" and "the double wage-earning couple [as] a new Peter and his wife out robbing Paul. . . ."[46] Smith's article emphasized one reason why Americans disliked working married women, but she avoided the additional prejudices that working mothers faced.

In "Mothers in Industry," social worker Gwendolyn Hughes Berry worried about the effects that a mother's working had on her children. Citing a study in which social workers interviewed 728 working-class employed women in Philadelphia, Berry acknowledged the unavoidable pressures which forced poor married women into paid employment, but Berry was nonetheless negative about the personal and social consequences of such a trend.[47] After admitting that there was little or no substantial data available to support the theory that the employment of mothers was harmful to women and society, she proceeded to list reasons for assuming so. The Philadelphia study failed to show a direct relationship between a low birth rate and the number of working mothers, but Berry pointed out that employed mothers suffered a higher rate of miscarriages than nonworking mothers.[48] Even more worrisome, she said, was the fact that 50 percent of the study's 1,817 children who were over the age of five were cared for

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[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid., 263.

[47]Gwendolyn Hughes Berry, "Mothers in Industry," *Annals* 143 (May 1929): 317-19.

[48]Ibid., 322.

by older siblings or left unsupervised while their mothers worked. Over 6 percent of the children of compulsory school age were not enrolled, and many others missed several days of school because they were caring for younger brothers and sisters. Perhaps, she offered, that was why 41 percent of the 845 elementary school children in the study were behind their normal grade level, while only 25 percent of all Philadelphia public school children were listed as below grade level in October 1919.[49] In addition to these drawbacks, Berry added, children who were left to fend for themselves at a tender age were not able to enjoy childhood, and were forced to grow up before their time. This led to unruly behavior because an unsupervised, worldly child was "more susceptible to the influence of the gang, the movies, and what not."[50] Berry summarized by saying that while the evidence indicated that many women had to work in order for their families to survive, it was also an unfortunate fact that their employment was detrimental to their children and, inevitably, society. The only solution, she suggested, was to provide needy families with government financial aid so that mothers could stay home where they belonged.[51]

In her article, Berry focused attention on employed working-class women, but author Ernest R. Groves (one of only three male contributors) said he believed that it was the role of the married woman in business and professional life that was "more socially disturbing and the more important because of its personality

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[49]Ibid., 322-23.

[50]Ibid., 323.

[51]Ibid., 324.

effects."[52] Educated, middle-class women in business and the professions tended to enjoy their work more, Groves warned. This meant that they were also more likely to resent and even avoid marriage and motherhood if it meant leaving their jobs. That produced problems, the author said, because depressed or angry women did not make the best wives, or mothers of future Americans.[53] Also, it was the nation's loss when these "higher types" of women were forced to remain single, and childless, because social mores made it so difficult for them to combine marriage and career.[54] Groves stopped short of suggesting that married women should never work, but another male writer was not so reticent.

David Snedden, a professor of sociology at Columbia University, presented a harsher variety of pre-depression attitudes about working women. "We have learned to expect," Snedden declared, "that the children of gainfully employed mothers will be neglected, ill-disciplined, poorly nourished, and educationally irregular." What is more, working mothers were responsible for the severely high "death-rates among babies, truancy rates among the boys, and sexual immorality rates among the girls."[55] Most ominous to Snedden, was the "fairly abundant evidence that, as contrasted with more primitive social conditions, the American people is beginning to lose ground eugenically." Yet, he admonished, there had been little collective effort "during the last half century purposefully to

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[52]Ernest R. Groves, "The Personality Results of the Wage Employment of Women Outside the Home and Their Social Consequences," *Annals* 143 (May 1929): 343.

[53]Ibid., 341-47.

[54]Ibid.

[55]David Snedden, "Some Probable Social Consequences of the Out-Working of Well-Endowed Married Women," *Annals* 143 (May 1929): 354.

improve our stocks."[56] The cause of this sorry condition could be traced to the growing tendency for "out-working married women (or the too-prolonged out-working of single women) . . . of superior culture, family background or standard of living . . . to remain celibate."[57] What was disturbing, he warned, was that "superior" women would be increasingly inclined to work when they attained stimulating vocations which promoted a love of extra-domestic work.[58] It was Snedden's opinion that all public opinion agencies and schools should be activated to encourage persons of inferior heredities to have fewer children, and those of superior heredities to have more. Women should be severely discouraged from self-centered practices which impeded or detracted from "fine and adequate motherhood," and that pre-schools should be investigated to determine whether or not they encouraged women to work when "they should probably be better at work with their own children."[59]

Other Americans disapproved of working women, but their reasons for doing so derived from more practical concerns. The working-class man was embarrassed when his inability to support his family was advertised by the working wife.[60] In addition, he was worried by competitive industrial employers who were prone to replace higher paid, unionized male labor, with lower paid,

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[56]Ibid., 355-56.

[57]Ibid., 356-57.

[58]Ibid., 359.

[59]Ibid., 360.

[60]Berry, 316-18.

nonorganized female labor.[61] Survival, not idealism, was the motivating force behind the working-class man, as it was with the working-class woman. There was no sign that working-class women viewed outside employment as anything other than one of life's unpleasant necessities.

Female self-esteem and pride in individual accomplishments were more evident among educated, middle-class women. Yet the majority tended to accept, and reinforce (albeit unintentionally), the tacit understanding that women's destinies were determined more by their "innate weaknesses" than by environmental conditions. Educated, middle-class men seemed just as anxious as their less educated working-class brothers to reinforce old beliefs about women's "inferior" status and "proper" roles as wives and mothers. Their generalizations varied only on the proportions of the "danger" that working women supposedly posed to American society. It was also possible that like blue-collar workers, many business and professional men feared an influx of female competitors, which would glut the higher occupational fields and drive salaries down.

All of the fears about the destructive possibilities of cheap female labor and the working women's contributions to "race suicide" generated spirited debates on the propriety of female employment, but the worries and arguments about working married women were more heavily weighted against it. Even Mary Anderson, the Director of the Women's Bureau, had serious doubts as to how the "problem" could be solved.[62]

In her study on modern feminism, historian Nancy Cott demonstrated that

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[61]Mary Anderson, *Woman at Work* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1951), 102-3.

[62]Ibid., 155-56.

many of the women who were in the strongest positions to uphold and encourage the growth of economic independence for women simply did not believe in it. Besides female sociologists and reformers, representatives of the Women's Bureau, and the Children's Bureau, the Women's Trade Union League, and the National Consumers' League all sought to emphasize that married women worked *only* out of family loyalty or economic need. At no time, Cott pointed out, did these defenders of protective legislation ever espouse the belief that women worked because they liked it, or wished to promote feminist idealism.[63] When the Women's Bureau discovered that a significant proportion of the women employed in service and industry had children under six years of age, they unhesitatingly explained it as a desperate working-class response to crisis situations.

On the eve of the Depression, American attitudes about working women were far from accepting the possibility that women might willingly choose to work. Only a small number of highly educated, middle-class professional women came that close to acknowledging such a revolutionary sentiment. Yet even they were bothered by the emotionally charged questions over the wisdom or folly of combining work and motherhood.

When the Depression struck, middle-class women were faced with the same economic necessity that working-class women had struggled with. Many women who had worked only a few years before their marriages marched back into the labor force, but even then, with Americans admitting that the ideal of the breadwinning father and the homebound mother was not always possible, the hostility toward working married women continued.

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[63]Cott, 204-7.

CHAPTER III

THE DEPRESSION

The Depression was a jarring experience for usually confident and optimistic Americans. Jane Addams wrote in 1931 that she "watched fear grip the people in our neighborhood around Hull House, as heads of families watched their savings disappear and anticipated the hunger of their children before it occurred." Indeed, she said, the "clutch of cold fear is one of the most hideous aspects."[1] While roaming the country appraising the effects of the Depression, Sherwood Anderson lamented the "breaking down of the moral fiber" of the unemployed American man. "Losing that sense of being some part of the moving world of activity, so essential to an American man's sense of his manhood," Sherwood added, was a loss that could never be measured in dollars.[2] It was a humiliation felt by men of all socioeconomic levels. In Studs Terkel's oral history on the Depression, film critic Pauline Kael related that many of her fellow students at Berkeley in 1936 actually lost their fathers. "They had wandered off in disgrace because they couldn't support their families. Other fathers had killed themselves, so the family could have the insurance. . . . Each father took it as his personal failure."[3] Historian Christopher Lasch commented that almost all observers of the 1930s described a "sense of dismay and

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[1]Woloch, 440.

[2]Sherwood Anderson, *Puzzled America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 46.

[3]Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 398.

disorientation, futility and shame" in men. "Being unemployed seems to have been experienced more often as a humiliation . . . a matter of personal fault."[4] Given this atmosphere of male insecurity and fear, there was little chance that women could have achieved any gains in the labor force without also incurring universal ridicule and opposition. It was an unfortunate irony of the time that the environmental circumstances which proved most propitious for working women were also those which fostered the most hostile reaction in men.

As Christopher Lasch went on to recall, the government was at as great a loss as the general public in understanding and correcting the floundering American economic system. "There were no clear lines of policy followed. The whole New Deal . . . was really chaotic. All kinds of experiments were being tried constantly," with no goal beyond the immediate ending of the Depression in any way possible.[5] Carried out in an atmosphere of fear and confusion, the desperate search for programs and reforms to stimulate the economy and restore "normalcy" unexpectedly produced significant changes for women workers. For instance, in 1933, when the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was enacted, the government established industry-wide codes that regulated wage and hour provisions. Section 7A of the act, along with the 1935 Wagner Labor Relations Act, encouraged workers to join bargaining units, offered some protection to workers who wanted to organize, and required employers to negotiate with union representatives.[6] During the early years of the Depression union membership plummeted, leaving less than 6 percent of workers unionized. But with the New

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[4]Ibid., 391.

[5]Ibid., 390.

[6]Kessler-Harris, 261-62; Woloch, 447-48.

Deal incentives, and President Franklin Roosevelt's friendly invitation to join unions, millions of workers complied. By 1939, nine million workers, representing 17 percent of the labor force, belonged to unions.[7] This development set the stage for positive changes for women workers because, once strengthened, industrial unions eventually moved into factories where women employees predominated. Under the new Congress of Industrial Organizations, which offered a more relaxed admission policy than the American Federation of Labor, female union membership tripled between 1930 and 1940, reaching 800,000 by the beginning of World War II. Although women were unaccustomed to pressing for their rights, their very presence in unions provided many of them with valuable knowledge and experience.[8] In his account of depression conditions, Sherwood Anderson mentioned that he felt a "curious respect" for the women union members he met on his national trek. "They have nerve," he said, to take on the overbearingly masculine and often hostile world of labor union politics.[9] It was probable that more depression-era women were gaining valuable organizing experience, and confidence, than other eyewitnesses recorded.

Under the National Recovery Administration, industries were encouraged to cooperate in creating a series of codes to regulate employment, wages, production, and prices. In return, the government suspended anti-trust laws and pumped federal funds into industries sorely in need of capital for technological improvements. Once again women workers received some unintentional breaks from government intervention. The new codes set minimum-wage levels that were

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[7]Kessler-Harris, 262.

[8]Woloch, 449.

[9]Sherwood Anderson, 113.

considerably higher than what the majority of women received in their low-status occupations. After enactment of the codes, women employees often received dramatic pay gains, while male workers who were better paid to begin with realized smaller increases.[10] After the codes went into effect, women's wages in New York State rose 16.6 percent, while men's wages increased by only 3.4 percent. In Pennsylvania's manufacturing industries, female wages increased by an average of 11.6 percent, and in textiles, women's clothing, and cigar and tobacco making factories where women employees predominated, increases were more than double the average.[11] Despite the gains, women's pay remained far below men's wages, but that discouraged men from seeking their jobs, and deterred employers from replacing them with male labor. After the NIRA was invalidated, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 reinforced minimum hours and minimum wage policies. The FLSA also continued to sanction sex discrimination in business and industry, which preserved the old "women's" job category that men avoided. At the same time, the Civilian Works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Public Works Administration followed labor regulations which either excluded women or gave men preference and paid them more.[12] Paradoxically, while none of the government actions sought to alleviate the traditional gender-based job segregation that continued to hinder women's advancement opportunities, the old discriminations and male pride still "protected" women's positions in manufacturing.[13]

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[10]Kessler-Harris, 262-63.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Woloch, 448.

[13]Ibid., 448-49.

Other emergency measures unintentionally strengthened working women's position within the labor market. NIRA and FLSA codes succeeded in doing what women's interest groups had been striving for many years to attain. They limited production by reducing work hours, yet subjected men as well as women to the restrictions, which eliminated an important advantage that male workers had long held.[14] The federal capital that industry received allowed employers to modernize their plants and production processes, which often created new low-skill types of jobs to which women had long been relegated.[15] Unfornately, this revived a special fear in male workers. Men had learned that mechanization of production processes resulted in the breaking down or simplification of "masculine" jobs. These "easier" jobs no longer warranted the necessity for brute strength, or the higher wages male labor demanded. The developments of the Depression certainly justified these concerns, for as many industries became mechanized with the aid of government funds, men watched their old jobs disappear, while women workers moved in to operate the new equipment.[16]

Men's resistance to technological advance was understandable, even if many realized that immediate gains made at the expense of the nation's future economic soundness would only make the situation worse. Reason lost out during the confusion of the Depression, and male industrial workers were not alone in their emotional response. In particular, despite the fact that ego-shaken men would not take "women's" jobs, even in an emergency, male and female Americans continued

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[14]Kessler-Harris, 264.

[15]Ibid., 266.

[16]Ibid., 266-69.

to insist that cheap female labor was usurping men's jobs. Working married women were especially targeted for taking more than their fair share. The Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, reflected this sentiment when she denounced the employed married woman as a "pin-money worker," and a "menace to society, a selfish and short-sighted creature who ought to be ashamed of herself."[17] Throughout the Depression, state and local governments, with popular support, waged intense campaigns to eliminate married women from the labor force. In 1932, the Federal Economy Act decreed that married workers should be fired first if their spouse was also a federal employee. This insured that the wife was the first to leave because the husband's pay was always higher and therefore took precedence.[18] The Women's Bureau and others such as the National Women's Trade Union League upheld a married woman's right to work, but in order to minimize public anger, they clung to the old defense emphasizing economic need as the primary justification.[19] Many families were desperate for the extra income that a working mother provided, but because this "excuse" for married women's employment was so popularly accepted, the Depression conditions provided a perfect environment for the solidification of traditional beliefs about women's selfless devotion to family above all else.

Americans, male and female, were far from considering the notion that women, and particularly married women, had a right to work for all of the reasons that men did. Criticism continued as people struggled for something or someone to blame for the failure of the system. Some of the most virulent, and popular,

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[17]Woloch, 441.

[18]Kessler-Harris, 257.

[19]Ibid., 256-57.

theories to come out during the Depression were those which warned of the "feminization" of "masculine" American culture. There were dire warnings that women were being dangerously empowered and men were being "emasculated" by the modern trend which allowed women the freedom to achieve economic and personal independence. One result of this perspective was a profusion of wildly generalizing attacks on working women, but as was true of the 1920s, the majority of the assaults focused on middle-class professional and white-collar employed women. As the long-time feminist Lilian Symes observed, "it is certainly significant . . . that much of the new "anti-woman" sentiment has shown itself among what may be called, for want of a better term, "the intellectuals."[20]

In an article in the *American Mercury* magazine, U. V. Wilcox detailed what he considered an insidious encroachment of females into positions of power. "Through nearly forty years of Presidential administrations," he warned, "their numbers and influence had been building."[21] In the following diatribe Wilcox described five "types" of female government bureaucrats, all of whom possessed only negative personal and professional qualities. Yet for Wilcox, their very presence, let alone their ambition, was perceived as an ominous sign of political degradation.[22] There were many such magazine articles which criticized professional women in particular, while associating women's supposed freedom and independence with the deterioration of American society. Right-thinking people knew, media sources emphasized, that it took "masculine" skills

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[20]Lilian Symes, "The New Masculinism," *Harpers Monthly Magazine*, June 1930, 105.

[21]U. V. Wilcox, "New Deal Females," *American Mercury*, August 1936, 417-18.

[22]Ibid., 417-22.

and ambition to attain occupational heights, and that for women such a feat required an unnatural suppression of natural "feminine" qualities. In another *American Mercury* article, George Jean Nathan reiterated that it was "the masculinization of women, perhaps more than anything else, that stands out as the disturbing fly in the molasses."[23] From this anxiety, it was a short jump to the conclusion that "masculinized" women developed only when men were too weak to suppress them in the "naturally" ordained way. Tradition and history texts also nurtured the belief that an emasculated civilization, which willingly suppressed its birth rate, was one in the final stages of decadence and decline.[24] In a 1934 article that appeared in *Today* and the *Reader's Digest,* Miriam Beard (daughter of Charles and Mary Beard) cited Professor Alfred Baemler on this subject. Baemler maintained, she said, that women were responsible for "effeminate" cultures full of dangerous "sensual enjoyments, Literature and Theater, Science and Art." All of these "female" weaknesses lured men to self-destructive "female" softness, and away from the "masculine" hardness of military discipline and war preparedness. Beard found Baemler's claims particularly ominous since he openly agreed with Adolf Hitler on many points concerning women. Both men, she added, proclaimed that women were responsible for the "feminization" and subsequent downfall of Imperial Germany. This article was only an indication that such ideas were floating around American intellectual circles, but there was enough additional evidence in American history books and

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[23]George Jean Nathan, "Once There was a Princess," *American Mercury*, February 1930, 242.

[24]Will Durant, *The Mansions of Philosophy: A Survey of Human Life and Destiny* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1929), 381-405.

magazines to support the assertion that many people gave these warnings more than a casual consideration.[25]

When *Forum Magazine* asked "Are Men Mice?" they published responses from a male and a female writer. Alfred Uhler replied that "where women are concerned, the American male is as timid as the amoeba. . . . In America today the woman sits in the saddle, [and] to do this she has accentuated her male characteristics." Instead of making the ladies feel so secure by pandering to their demands, Uhler scolded, men should have shown them some of the adventurous spirit and aptitude that had propelled them to the manly feats of years past. Only then would women be forced to sit up and take notice of male superiority and "decide to be women again."[26] However, there was no sign that women came close to desiring, much less threatening, male superiority. For example, in her "no" reply, Margaret Fishback offered a classic example of what women were writing and reading throughout the most popular "women's" magazines during the 1930s. She defended the masculine integrity of American males by protesting that the majority of women were not militant extremists, but "normal females who glory in domineering husbands."[27] Such claims as Mr. Uhler's, she assured the reader, were nonsense because deep down every woman knew there was "no other female accomplishment that equals marriage, independent career women to the contrary notwithstanding. A career is at best a poor substitute for

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[25]Ibid.; Mariam Beard, "The Nazis Harness Woman Power," *Reader's Digest*, July 1934, 13-15.

[26]Alfred Uhler and Margaret Fishback, "Are Men Mice?," *Forum Magazine*, July 1938, 18.

[27]Ibid., 19.

a happy marriage."[28] This same theme was repeated countless times in the most widely read magazines, just as it had been since the advent of American magazine publishing over one hundred years before.[29] Literally millions of women bought magazines every month, and the biggest sellers, the *Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's,* and the *Saturday Evening Post* contained advertising, fictional pieces, and "factual" advice articles which exclusively emphasized the "proper" ideals of marriage, motherhood, and feminine appearance and behavior.[30] In addition, vocal as well as written harangues which questioned the masculinity of men who "permitted" women to exercise freedom of thought and behavior had been common for centuries. Yet, despite this exaggerated emphasis on femininity and womanly roles, there was little cause for concern. Though it was possible that some women did not identify with the popular media image of the saintly housewife and mother, it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that most American women of the 1930s accepted traditional beliefs. That did not seem to matter to those who were of the opinion that women's increasing labor force participation was disturbing the "natural" order of human existence.

With the growing strength and influence of the sociological sciences during the 1930s came a revised, but no less traditional, version of people's ancient suspicion of change. Several studies were conducted throughout the country to determine whether and how the Depression emergency had affected the American family. What they found should have alleviated anyone's anxieties,

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[28]Ibid., 20.

[29]Woloch, 97-112.

[30]Ibid., 408-11; Chafe, *The American Woman*, 104-7.

either about working mothers, or the effect that employment had on the fundamental beliefs of women.

Ruth Cavan and Katherine Rauck interviewed one hundred families in Chicago in 1934 and 1935, and made what became a common discovery of depression-era sociological studies. "It seems clear from the present study," they concluded, "that only rarely did the crisis cause the development of any totally new reactions."[31] By far, the sociologists observed, the most common, and least psychically disturbing, adaptation was invariably made when men and women were faced with the disruption of their accustomed life style and role playing. No working mother gave any reason beyond the preservation of the family as a justification for outside employment. Families which had been loving and strong before the Depression became even more so, by surviving their hardships through measures deemed necessary by all the members. Those families which did not remain intact during the trying times were not happy or united to begin with and were incapable of attaining the cooperation that was so vital to survival.[32] This seemed to eliminate the possibility that one particular factor, such as the mother's employment, could have caused family breakdowns. Far from enjoying the loss of male status, when cooperation undermined the father's dominant role, other family members were uncomfortable with the alteration in his traditional position. Robert Angell's mid-1930s study of fifty families of University of Michigan students disclosed that the wives and children of happy families usually joined together in efforts to bolster the spirits, and

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[31]Ruth Shonle Cavan and Katherine Howland Rauck, *The Family and the Depression* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1938), 8-10.

[32]Ibid.

egos, of unemployed fathers.[33]

Lewis Terman's 1934-1935 survey of eight hundred couples in the San Francisco Bay Area explored male-female relationships. Around 70 percent of the responding couples said their marriages were happy. At the same time, 80 percent said that they solved disagreements through a mutual give and take, and over 70 percent agreed on the handling of the family finances and the care of children. Among the majority of female participants, cooperation and self-sacrifice, not individualism, were stressed as the decisive elements for family, not personal, survival.[34] Between 1934 and 1935, Mirra Komarovsky interviewed fifty-nine families in "a large industrial city just outside New York City." Out of the fifty-nine husbands, Komarovsky found that forty-five experienced no breakdown in their authority because of unemployment. As for thirteen others who did lose status, Komarovsky concluded that "unemployment [did] not so much change the sentiments of the wife towards the husband, as it [made] explicit the unsatisfactory sentiments that already existed prior to the depression."[35]

The evidence of the survival of traditional values presented in the above studies was compromised by the fact that the married subjects were white, and middle- to upper-class. There were few studies of poorer working-class families, and these were included in larger comprehensive surveys of all socioeconomic levels. Yet in one such study by Edward Rundquist and Raymond Sletto, in which

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[33]Robert Cooley Angell, *The Family Encounters the Depression* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 61.

[34]Lewis M. Terman, *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1938), 40-53.

[35]Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and His Family* (New York: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1940), 23, 54.

2,882 men were interviewed in Minneapolis, the researchers reached familiar sounding conclusions. From working- to upper-class subjects, they found that "the experience of unemployment affected personality adversely in proportion to the number of unfavorable factors already present in the life history or environmental situation of the individual."[36] Significantly, there was an obvious difference in the proportions of men in each socioeconomic group who were or were not able to adapt to the traumas of unemployment. Rundquist and Sletto noted that "discouragement and a sense of hopelessness is greatest among men in the semi-skilled groups, among older men, and among men with the least education."[37] These men would indeed have resented the apparent growth and stability of "women's" jobs in manufacturing, but the middle- to upper-class unemployed men were more likely to be irritated by the perceived gains of white-collar and professional working women.

The aforementioned study results, and more, could be found in the Muncie, Indiana, "Middletown" research project conducted during the 1920s and 1930s by Robert and Helen Lynd. Their findings were important because the attitudes of the people living in the growing town of Muncie probably came close to reflecting the beliefs of the majority of rural and small town Americans during that time. Between 1924 and 1925, when the Lynds conducted their first study, and 1935, when they returned for a second survey, Muncie's population increased from 36,500 to

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[36]Edward A. Rundquist and Raymond F. Sletto, *Personality in the Depression* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1936), 366.

[37]Ibid., 367.

47,000 people.[38] Nationwide, statistics revealed that of the 131.7 million Americans listed in the 1940 Census, only 30 percent lived in cities of more than 100,000 people, with some 70 million people still living in towns of less than 10,000 citizens.[39] Average depression-era Americans were rural or small town denizens who had little reason to question the values which had served their ancestors for centuries. However, at the same time, growth and unprecedented technological innovations were advancing, even during a time of depression, and the Lynds recorded some interesting, and contradictory, adaptations to the changing environment.

In the 1935 update of their 1920s study, the Lynds observed that little seemed to have changed in Muncie between 1925 and 1935. From what had been gathered from personal interviews, the church, the press, the city government, and the civic clubs, the majority of Muncie citizens sincerely believed that the family was a sacred institution and the fundamental institution of our society.[40] To ensure the survival of the family, a married woman's place was first of all in the home, and she was to consider any other activities as secondary to the making of a warm refuge for her husband and children.[41] When the Lynds observed "Middletown" people to discern whether family life had changed since 1925, they concluded that personal relationships, particularly

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[38]Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1965), 3.

[39]Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States Since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1980), 17-18.

[40]Lynd, 402, 410.

[41]Ibid., 410.

the close relationships within the family, were "toughly resistant to change from without."[42] The Lynds added that many people believed the hard times had brought most families closer together. Although it was their "guess" that husbands had lost more prestige than had wives during the Depression, "Middletown's" conception of male and female roles had not changed significantly.[43] The Lynds also recorded that between 1933 and 1935, there was a 54.6 percent increase in the divorce rate, but rather than facing up to this failure, "Middletown" averted its eyes and talked about marriage as a "sacred institution," while every day in the courtrooms, reality challenged beliefs.[44] Once again, this study focused primarily on middle- and upper-class citizens, and though they comprised 60 percent of all "Middletown" families, the working-class population was not investigated with the same thoroughness that the higher socioeconomic groups were accorded.[45]

Despite the Lynds' frequent admissions throughout their study that separate sources of information on the working-class were not available, they nonetheless made various assertions. For instance, in a chapter dealing with the dynamics of the family, they referred to the opinion of a "veteran judge." He testified that eighteen years of professional experience had shown him that the "laboring class" had been responsible for more than 80 percent of all divorces in the county.[46] In several instances in the section discussing divorce,

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[42]Ibid., 201.

[43]Ibid., 202.

[44]Ibid., 154-62.

[45]Ibid., 155.

[46]Ibid.

the Lynds pointed out that more working-class married women were employed. But instead of directly stating that this factor had led to the increased incidence of divorce among the working-class, they frequently emphasized that families with non-working middle- and upper-class wives had not broken up as often.[47] Unlike Rundquist and Sletto, who detected the link between a working-class man's lower level of education and skills and his ability to withstand unemployment and an accompanying marital strain, the Lynds made no such connection.

The Lynds, and the majority of the social and behavioral scientists of the 1920s and 1930s, were primarily interested in the well-being of middle- and upper-class Americans. Along with this focused concern came a particular interest in the role that women played in the perpetuation of a vital society. There were passages in the Lynds 1935 "Middletown" study which, perhaps unintentionally, demonstrated the researchers' sensitivity to women's changing status, no matter how small those changes were at the time. They made special note of the fact that during the prosperity of the late 1920s there had been a substantial increase in the proportion of married women gainfully employed in "Middletown" in relation to the total number of women employed nationwide.[48] This, they said, threw an interesting light on the values that went into "Middletown's" homemaking, because the women who were entering the labor force were from the same group who, according to "Middletown's" way of looking at things, needed least to do gainful work.[49] Why, they asked, did the financially comfortable women work

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[47]Ibid., 152-62.

[48]Ibid., 181.

[49]Ibid.

during prosperous times? Everyone understood that "Middletown's" single women worked out of necessity, but they added that it appeared to be "for more than bread alone that its married women leave their homes to work."[50] A change of this sort strongly suggested, they concluded, that "Middletown's" traditions which upheld the family as the "fundamental institution" of society were in the process of a "devious," or rather involuntary, transformation:

> The thing that is changing it most is not changes from within its own coherently knit ideologies--not changes in awareness of women's individual differences, capacities, and propensities, not changes in the conception as to what "home" means or what the role of a "wife" or "mother" is--but the pressure from without of a culturally stimulated rising psychological standard of living. In responding to the latter, wives are incidentally changing significantly the pattern of "marriage," "family life," "wife," and "mother" in Middletown. [51]

In the reference to a "rising psychological standard of living," the Lynds were stating that it was the environment, and not ideology which promoted changes in human behavior. Wives were only "incidentally," not intentionally, changing traditional patterns of behavior. For instance, they theorized that a general atmosphere of prosperity, such as that which existed during the late 1920s, probably raised expectations about what constituted an acceptable standard of living. Simple, or comfortable subsistence became less satisfying and harder to justify when people were making more money than was necessary for a humble but adequate existence. Therefore, the Lynds reasoned, the women who worked even when their husbands earned enough for simple comfort, were merely reacting to a rise in expectations about what constituted a proper life style. The authors suggested that newly developed desires for such "necessities" as "putting the boy

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[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid.

through college," or the purchase of a car, an electric refrigerator, or a house with a furnace, might well have been the primary motivating force behind these women's decisions to enter the labor force. However, they added that it was also possible that "in many cases the work of married women represents an escape from boredom and uncongenial home duties."[52] Why did the Lynds make such a statement unless they had detected this sentiment during the course of their research? This oddity was compounded as the authors continued their discussion of working women.

After they presented their painstaking case for the motivations behind the increased labor force participation of women who did not need to work, the Lynds made a contradictory statement. They explained that when they spoke of married women's working in "Middletown," they were talking almost exclusively of "Middletown's" working class and the lowest rungs of the business class.[53] The Lynds went on to list data which confirmed this, which made their extensive coverage of working middle- to upper-class women all the more curious. In addition, the authors persistently emphasized throughout their study that "Middletown" citizens, male and female, overwhelmingly disapproved of married women working. Out of the 12,128 homemakers counted by the 1930 Census, only 1,710 of these described themselves as "usually" gainfully employed. Of these, 488, or 28.5 percent, were industrial workers, and 355, or 20.7 percent, were servants or waitresses. This meant, the Lynds explained, that around 50 percent of all employed married women worked in jobs deemed completely "unacceptable"

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[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid., 181-82.

for any middle- to upper-class woman.[54] An additional 286 or 16.7 percent of working married women were office workers, and 196 or 11.5 percent were saleswomen. These figures showed that almost 28 percent of working women held jobs that "Middletown" "highly disapproved" of. Finally, only 179, or 10.5 percent, of employed married women occupied professional positions that "Middletown" "slightly disapproved" of.[55] In all, 77 percent of all employed married women worked in "unacceptable" or "highly disapproved" jobs where working-class women predominated. A remaining 23 percent were employed in professional occupations, the majority of which were the traditional "women's" jobs of teaching and nursing. Possibly it was the stigma attached to most occupations and working married women that deterred many women from seeking employment unless it was necessary.

There were not enough middle- to upper-class married women working to have generated the intense level of interest or opposition. Had the researchers heard or observed more female dissatisfaction with traditional constraints than they were willing either to accept or formally disclose? There were comments throughout their report which indicated they did. For instance, in a discussion on the types of jobs attainable by "Middletown" males, the Lynds added that:

> It is important to note that in Middletown's business class the woman's world largely lacks an institutionalized counterpart to the business enterprise which affords an outlet for a restless, energetic, venturesome male. The nearest a business-class wife can come to the same type of psychological release through risk and courage are competitive social life and the brief experiences of childbirth. Middletown's small-city culture is set up to provide for the more urgent needs of the commoner personality types and

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[54]Ibid., 59-61, 184.

[55]Ibid.

> functions; and it presents a deterring conservative front to the type of woman who would explore unusual vocational opportunities.[56]

The use of the term "psychological release," is telling. Why would "Middletown's" contented middle-class women have needed such an outlet? The Lynds also brought up the observation that all but the most "common personality types" were harshly criticized as radicals, and quickly associated with subversive causes such as Communists.[57] This aligning of the subjects of nontraditional women and political radicals was an indication that the authors believed the environment deterred all but the most daring of women from pursuing "unusual" careers. At the same time, there was the possibility that given an opening, some middle-class women would have willingly explored life experiences outside the traditional wife and mother boundaries. The Lynds commented that women, more often than men, were increasingly being challenged by the contradictory, and therefore confusing, dynamics of a rapidly changing environment.

The Lynds stated that in comparison to the "relative fixity" of the male world, the female world had "exhibited more change and opened wider chasms of difficult choice."[58] For many people, "woman's traditional great dependence upon man" was becoming "less acceptable and more irksome."[59] There was no elaboration on this glimmer of nontraditional thought, but later, after a discussion about how "endlessly busy" the average "Middletown" wife was with flower gardens, study clubs, charities, and "finer things of life," the Lynds again

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[56]Ibid., 64.

[57]Ibid., 64, 382, 429-34.

[58]Ibid., 178.

[59]Ibid.

explained why middle- to upper-class married women avoided outside employment:

> The routine, subservient nature of most of the occupations open to women in Middletown is a factor which makes it easy for the business-class Middletown husband, backed by the weight of his class culture, to stifle any fugitive aspirations of his wife to get a job, and for the woman herself to allow her restless ambition to "do something" to evaporate.[60]

The word "stifle," and the statement that a woman must "allow" herself to be dissuaded from pursuing her "restless ambition," implied that the researchers observed something of the sort going on. Just how much restless ambition "evaporated?" The Lynds supplied only enough information to indicate that something nontraditional was developing. In another reference to the role that a husband played in a wife's decision to toe the traditional line, the Lynds again conveyed the idea that a negative environment frustrated the typical "Middletown" married woman's ability to seek outside employment:

> Fortunately perhaps for them, most married women of the business class in Middletown, particularly those in their thirties and older, desire no gainful activity and regard themselves as fortunate in being limited to their orthodox pattern of home and social life. A business-class woman with a flair for creating and managing things, however, and either without children or disinclined to let them and the local round of "women's life" monopolize her time, often finds herself in a difficult position. She is chained to Middletown by her husband's job; she is usually compelled to be active and liked locally as an adjunct to her husband's business contacts, and this means in Middletown being "regular," as defined by the central traditions of the business-class mores; if she has no children, she finds an undue load of civic and club work thrown on her shoulders just because she "has more free time"; she often chafes at what she regards as the inconsequential nature of much of the women's routine; and she finds too few of her kind in a city of this size to enable her to develop specialized interest associations.[61]

Once again, the words "chained," "compelled," and "chafes," offered a possibly illuminating picture of an American female population that was struggling, with diminishing enthusiasm, to adhere to restrictive traditional values. This passage

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[60]Ibid., 182.

[61]Ibid., 185.

suggested that average "Middletown" married women had to be bullied into conformity because their personal desires might have led them into unconventional life choices.

Did the Lynds' "Middletown" study mirror, on a small scale, what was occurring on the national scene? The sociologists insisted in some instances that environment, and not ideology, was the motivating force behind middle- to upper-class women's decisions to work outside the home. Yet at other times, the Lynds gave indications that women's desires to work, no matter what the environment, was so evident that husbands and society actively collaborated to squelch it. When the Lynds failed to address this contradiction, they demonstrated a reluctance to openly recognize and follow up on the conflicts that arose during their research. While the people of "Middletown" vigorously insisted that their faith in traditional values was as strong as ever, their perceivable dissatisfactions were also evident enough to raise doubts as to the depth of their conviction.

The "Middletown" study went far in explaining why the low rumble of concerned voices grew louder throughout the 1920s and 1930s, particularly from the intellectual sector. Women may have been privately, yet increasingly, voicing dissatisfactions with the restrictions perpetuated under the traditional gender role status quo. Middle- to upper-class men, alarmed by the inevitable revolutionary consequences of alterations in the status quo, which many imagined would have harmful effects on male authority and privilege, diligently opposed such a development.

Statistics showed that women comprised less than a quarter of all working Americans during those two decades, and that they were overwhelmingly employed

in traditionally accepted "female" jobs, from the factory worker to the professional. Except for such professional occupations as teaching, practical nursing, accounting, social work, and librarians, where women lost their jobs to a small number of men, most of the "women's" jobs were avoided by males who considered such work too demeaning, even during a depression. No matter how desperate men became for work, they did not replace women as domestic servants, waitresses, laundry workers, or low-level clerical or factory drudges.[62] Best selling magazines flooded the national consciousness with reassuring articles purportedly written by and about satisfied, happy housewives and mothers, as well as disillusioned and repentant feminists.[63] Study after study affirmed that women who worked considered it a service to their families, and not as an expression of independence and self-interest. Once employed, women found that gender segregation was the strictly enforced rule, promotional opportunities and pay were severely restricted in all "women's" jobs, and that working women's ability to change anything for their advantage was effectively blocked by well organized, experienced, and hostile male co-workers.

In addition to all of these factors, the newly developing opinion polls and magazine reader surveys were churning out more evidence that the majority of American women were devoted to their traditional roles, and sought outside employment only when it was beneficial to someone besides themselves. In October 1936, when a *Fortune* poll asked Americans whether they believed that married women should have full-time jobs outside of their homes, 47.7 percent

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[62]Kessler-Harris, 260-61.

[63]Rose Wilder Lane, "Woman's Place is in the Home," *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1936, 18, 94.

replied "no," 34.6 percent said "no, unless they need it," and a small 15.1 percent answered "yes."[64] There was a slight difference between the numbers of men (85.2 percent), and women (79.4 percent) replying in the negative, while only 11.9 percent of the men, and 18.3 percent of the women, felt married women should work full-time away from home. When the "nos" were asked for reasons for their response, 36.2 percent said that women took jobs away from men, 35.3 percent said "woman's place is in the home," and 20.8 percent believed that healthier children and a happier home life was possible only when women did not work.[65] The following year, on June 20, 1937, an American Institute of Opinion Poll (AIOP) asked Americans whether they approved of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she had a husband capable of supporting her. There was a barely discernible decline from the *Fortune* poll to 82 percent who replied "no," with a small increase to 18 percent replying "yes."[66] On Christmas Day of 1938, when the AIOP asked the same question again, 78 percent said "no," and 22 percent said "yes." In addition, between the 1936 and the 1938 polls the number of men who approved of married women working even when their husbands were capable of supporting them rose from 11.9 percent to 19 percent, while the rate of "no" responses declined from 85.2 percent to 81 percent. The "yes" responses of women increased from 18.3 percent to 25 percent, while the "nos" decreased from 79.4 percent to 75 percent.[67] Though a

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[64]Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion 1935-1946* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 1044.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid.

slightly increasing approval rate was detectable, such resounding support for traditional ideals on "proper" gender roles seemed to rule out any possibility of dramatic attitude changes.

In 1938 and 1939 the *Ladies' Home Journal* conducted a poll of its three million readers on what the women of America thought of men, marriage, children, politics, careers, morals and manners. In the introduction, they made the claim that their survey represented a cross section of the nation's 37 million women, because women from all over the country, both urban and rural, and of all races, marital status, and income levels read the *Journal.*[68] It was questionable whether working women, most of whom were employed as factory operatives, domestic servants, waitresses or field workers, had much opportunity for filling out magazine surveys. Further, the subject of working women was given only a superficial treatment in the *Journal* survey. Nevertheless, this type of opinion poll reflected what the popular media portrayed as the average American woman's attitudes about herself and her relations with men.

In the only section which asked female readers about working women, the *Journal* wanted to know if readers believed a woman lost feminine qualities when she held an important position in business. Surprisingly, 64 percent said they did not think so, while 36 percent believed she did.[69] None of the questions dealt with the average employed woman, and it was never stated how many of the respondents were working outside of their homes. However,

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[68]Mary Cookman, "What do the Women of America Think About Men?," *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1939, 12.

[69]Henry F. Pringle, "What do the Women of America Think About Careers?," *Ladies Home Journal*, November 1939, 12.

when it was asked whether women workers should receive the same pay as men when they both worked the same job, 88 percent said "yes."[70] When asked whether readers would have given up a job if their husbands had asked them to, 87 percent said they would have. On the following question, a smaller 42 percent replied that the word "obey" should be retained in the marriage vows, but 57 percent of these did not believe it was necessary to live up to this vow.[71] Further insights appeared when women overwhelmingly supported equality of authority within marriage. Two-thirds of the respondents believed that men and women were equals when it came to intelligence, and 77 percent agreed that husbands and wives should make all important decisions together. Only 9 percent of the women respondents replied that husbands should possess total control.[72] Another 75 percent said husbands and wives together should control the family finances, and a small 8 percent replied that only the husband should hold such power.[73] Yet 57 percent of the women thought that wives lost respect for husbands who earned less than themselves, and 72 percent believed that women workers should be fired first during a worker reduction.[74]

When male readers were asked to send in their responses in a special one-time survey, their answers provided an insight into the predominant socioeconomic standing of the *Journal's* readers. Ninety-one percent of the

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[70]Henry F. Pringle, "What do the Women of America Think About the Double Standard?," *Ladies Home Journal*, November 1938, 52.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid.; Cookman, "What . . . About Men?," 63.

[73]Henry F. Pringle, "What do the Women of America Think About Money?," *Ladies Home Journal*, April 1938, 14.

[74]Pringle, "What . . . About the Double Standard?," 52.

male respondents believed that women should work before marriage, but the same amount of men said that wives should not work after marriage if their husbands were capable of supporting them. Over half of the men asserted that American women were spoiled, and 59 percent said women gave too much time to things outside the home. When they were asked about these other preoccupations, 55 percent said clubs, 54 percent said parties, 52 percent said bridge, 37 percent said movies, and 13 percent said sports, with most men giving more than one answer.[75] These were usually the characteristics and activities of middle-, not working-class women. Finally, 53 percent of the men answering the *Journal* survey replied that authority and responsibility in the home should be equal, which was less than the percentage of women making the same response to this question. However, it was greater than might have been expected given the public preoccupation with masculine themes in the popular literature of the time.[76]

Most of the best selling literature of the 1920s and 1930s depicted men in the heroically masculine roles of cowboys, adventurers, detectives, and soldiers. Yet there was a strained quality about much of this material which did not celebrate male supremacy so much as it suggested male insecurity. The novels of Ernest Hemingway and Jack London in particular seemed to mourn the loss of traditional masculinity far more than they praised the contemporary manifestation of manliness.[77] While the image of men was being built up in books regaling masculine virtues, just as many authors, male and female, were portraying strong,

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[75]Henry F. Pringle, "What do the Men of America Think About Women?," *Ladies Home Journal*, April 1939, 14, 95.

[76]Ibid., 95.

[77]Leo Gurko, *Heroes, Highbrows and the Popular Mind* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953), 169-70, 185-86.

individualistic women as social deviants who inevitably came to either a repentant or an unhappy end.

In *Main Street* (1920), Sinclair Lewis doomed his city-loving, business-oriented heroine, Carol Kennicott, to a sternly chastened and tragically defeated existence in a stiflingly conservative small town.[78] Edna Ferber allowed her hardy protagonist, Sabra Cravat, to achieve her ambitious career goals, but she lost the love of her life and regretted it in *Cimmaron* (1930).[79] Christopher Morley also permitted *Kitty Foyle* (1939) to build a successful business career, but likewise required the loss of true love as the price.[80] Daphne du Maurier created a proudly emancipated *Rebecca* (1938), but had her acquiring her freedom through rapacious means, and sent her to her just reward in a violent death.[81] In *Gone With the Wind* (1936), Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara perseveres through the brutal mental and physical trials of the Civil War to become a tough and successful farmer and businesswoman, but Mitchell made sure that her victories were tainted by the ruination of her "reputation" as a "lady," and again, the well-deserved loss of true love.[82] The popularity of these stories was further evidenced by the

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[78]Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: Signet Classic, 1980), 433-39.

[79]Edna Ferber, *Cimmaron* (New York: P. F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1930), 360, 388.

[80]Christopher Morley, *Kitty Foyle* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1939), 242, 338-40.

[81]Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1938), 263-64.

[82]Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 616-19, 727-33.

fact that all were made into motion pictures, and all but *Main Street,* under the film title *I Married a Doctor* (1936), were either nominated for or won the Academy Award for best picture during the 1930s and 1940s.[83]

Americans seemed pleased when fictional female characters were punished for nontraditional thoughts and behavior. How did they feel about the real thing? It was significant that individuals such as author Sherwood Anderson and historian Christopher Lasch, as well as the many sociologists, and the creators of the public opinion polls and magazine surveys, all displayed a predominating concern for the well-being of male pride during the "humiliating" trials of the Depression years. No one showed such anxiety over the possible destruction of female self-esteem. Instead, there was a vigilant, and often hostile, alertness for any signs of female efforts to gain stature. Perhaps this was because the vast majority of men and women overwhelmingly associated a strong, healthy and happy society with such traditionally accepted "masculine" virtues as intellectual and physical superiority, courage, competitiveness, and "rugged individualism."[84] Women, who were believed to be hindered by their biologically determined maternal functions, and the "feminine" qualities of "inferior" mental and physical strengths, timidity, passivity and cooperative tendencies, were easily relegated to the merely supportive roles of wives and mothers.[85] Because the body of these beliefs was supported upon a solid

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[83]Leslie Halliwell, *Halliwell's Film Guide* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1989), 199, 414, 498, 566, 841.

[84]Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (Toronto, Canada: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, Ltd., 1984), 340-41.

[85]Ibid.

foundation of traditional reverence for the family institution as civilization's Primary model for social order, women were hard pressed to justify "rebellious" ambitions.

On the exterior of American society during the 1930s, nothing indicated that traditional values were in danger of being eroded, even within the dis-illusioning environment of the Depression. But a simmering concern for the "woman problem" persisted, and an excess of printed "warnings" about women's "proper" role, and the dire consequences of their "deviant" behavior, suggested that *something* was occurring beneath the observable, and recorded, surface of pre-World War II America. Much of it denoted the existence of a profound confusion over the abstract nature of the problems people were uncomfortably forced to wrestle with in their rapidly changing world. For instance, financially desperate working-class men and women recognized the need for wives to work, but neither wanted to see cheap female labor drive male wages down or replace men (i.e., their husbands) in the workplace. Competitive business employers were happy to replace higher-paid male workers with traditionally lower-paid women laborers, but as members of the higher-status, middle- and upper-classes, these same employers also vigorously resisted any attempts by their own wives to seek employment outside of their homes. Men from all socioeconomic levels considered a wife's outside employment as tantamount to a public declaration of a husband's shameful inability to fulfill his masculine role as family provider. Inevitably, this attitude left a wife with the unhappy choice of either repressing all non-domestic interests and activities in order to assuage her husband's ego, or defying his wishes and inviting not only marital discord but the open disapproval of her society as well.

Male pride may also have been behind much of the "intellectual" insistence that the well-being of American society relied upon women's crucial participation as breeders and caretakers of the nation's future "superior" citizens. In addition, middle- and upper-class men may not have been any less concerned than working-class men about the possibility of women workers moving into and glutting their jealously guarded and higher paid employment fields. Other human tendencies might also have prompted a reaction to the traditional forces of male ego.

As Robert and Helen Lynd seemed to have picked up during their study, middle- and upper-class women were beginning to exhibit behavior which led the sociologists to comment upon the limited "psychic outlets" available to dissatisfied women with nontraditional aspirations. White and minority working-class women who had been toiling under miserable conditions in boring, low-paying, low-status, dead-end jobs for many years, almost certainly sought employment out of economic necessity. But the growing number of job-seeking white, middle- and upper-class women, many of whom were older and married, signified the development of a new historical trend. Most of these women were better educated than their working-class sisters and were therefore qualified for and aspired toward the more comfortable, satisfying, and higher-status white-collar and professional jobs. In one study of the nation's 1939 labor supply, economist John Parrish discovered that 75 percent of those applying for work for the first time during the Depression were women over twenty-five years of age. What surprised Parrish was that these women were often married, and that they entered the labor force at twice the rate of men. By 1940, 1.2 percent of all employed men were "new" workers, while 2.5 percent of all

working women listed themselves as first-time wage earners.[86] In 1930, married women represented 28.8 percent of all employed females, but by 1940, their portion had grown to 35 percent."[87]

The labor shortages during World War II did not mark the beginning of the trend which saw increasing numbers of married, middle-aged, middle-class women entering the labor force, but the crisis conditions accelerated its development. Maybe the wartime loosening of traditional gender role patterns provided many nontraditional and traditional-but-restless women with the justification they needed to explore the environment outside of their homes.

Was the four-year window of opportunity enough time for men and women to benefit from the types of personal experiences necessary for permanent attitude changes? The wartime need for heightened production and the concurrent loss of male labor into military service provided a uniquely encouraging environment for women to realize new potential. That same wartime environment, however, may also have produced a simmering resentment when people, solidly grounded in old beliefs and animosities, were forced by circumstances to suppress their accustomed behavior only in the name of national survival.

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[86]Kessler-Harris, 258-59.

[87]Ibid., 259.

CHAPTER IV

DEFENSE PLANT WORKERS

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the nation was jolted into action. Almost immediately, auto plants were converted into aircraft factories, shipyards were enlarged, and munitions and military supply plants were built. Eventually, Americans faced the fact that a large body of female labor would have to take the place of the dwindling supply of male labor during the wartime emergency. Just as women had responded to the nation's need for war workers during the first world war, many once again entered the "man's" world of durable goods production. Yet there was evidence that most heavy industry employers, labor union leaders and remaining (nonmilitary) male workers were far from accepting the situation with as much patriotic zeal as was portrayed in the popular media. In fact, Ruth Milkman has argued that each of these long feuding factions were anxiously aware that the wartime situation could drastically alter the always volatile work force.[1] The result was that each of these groups persistently resisted the introduction of female labor until all methods for securing male labor had been exhausted. Male workers were lured from nonessential (civilian) production industries, retired men were encouraged to return, transient workers were recruited, and many businesses made do with their dwindling male labor supply until female labor

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[1]Ruth Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work': The Sexual Division of Labor in the Auto Industry During World War II," *Feminist Studies* 8 (Summer 1982): 347-48.

replacement was no longer avoidable.[2] By October 1942, President Roosevelt chastised those who were hampering the war effort with such stalling tactics: "In some communities employers dislike to hire women. In others they are reluctant to hire Negroes. We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudice."[3] The government thereafter set male employment ceilings, gave the War Manpower Commission the power to enforce them, and offered war supply contracts as inducements to durable goods producers to insure more cooperation.[4]

Employers, union leaders, and male workers finally complied, but many pains were taken to ensure that the "invasion" of unwelcome women and minorities was controlled, and their gains limited.[5] They were aided in this endeavor by the government, which considered its goal accomplished once women and minorities were being hired, and thereafter made little effort to police job placement or wage and promotion policies within industry.[6] As a result, old reliable discriminatory tactics were revitalized, and by 1943, a government survey found that in the auto industry's Detroit plants, over half of the women workers, compared to only 11 percent of the men, were clustered in five of the seventy-two job classifications. As late as 1944, the United Auto Workers (UAW) Women's Bureau found that 45 percent of the plants responding to their survey upheld job

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Gluck, 10.

[4]Milkman, 348; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 56-60.

[5]Theresa Wolfson, "Aprons and Overalls in War," *Annals* 229 (September 1943): 46-55.

[6]Milkman, *Gender at Work . . .*, 56.

designations that were formally organized on a "male" and "female" basis.[7] In her study of the shipbuilding industry in Oregon, Karen Beck Skold found that sex segregation and promotional and wage discrimination was firmly entrenched. She noted that by 1943, a War Manpower Commission (WMC) survey showed that over 80 percent of the female employees at Vancouver, and 90 percent at Swan Island, worked in the lowest category of unskilled "laborers."[8]

The "equal pay for equal work" issue rose in importance as unions and male workers became concerned that men's wages would be permanently lowered if employers were permitted to pay female labor traditional "women's" wages while they were working traditional "men's" jobs. The National War Labor Board responded to this anxiety by issuing General Order No. 16 in November 1942. This permitted employers to "equalize wage or salary rates paid to females with rates paid to males for comparable quality and quantity of work."[9] But once again the government retreated from further interference by neglecting to pass another order prohibiting wage discriminations based on gender.[10] While women's wages in durable goods industries rose well above their prewar levels, they still averaged only 55 percent of what male co-workers earned. This was actually less than the 1939 difference when women's pay was 62 percent of what

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[7]Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work'. . .", 349.

[8]Karen Beck Skold, "The Job He Left Behind: American Women in the Shipyards During World War II," in *Women, War and Revolution*, eds. Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), 64.

[9]Kessler-Harris, 289.

[10]Ibid.

men earned, and the situation did not improve throughout the war.[11] To further strengthen their control over women employee's gains, labor unions actively encouraged female membership, but often failed to act in women's behalf. Many wartime contracts not only limited women's access to certain prestigious "men's" jobs, but also provided barriers to progressive training and promotional opportunities.[12] Perhaps most important to male labor leaders and workers was the desire to make women understand that all extraordinary measures taken to "accommodate" female labor would last only "for the duration." As a way of guaranteeing such an outcome, union contracts were "mined" with seniority rights clauses specifying a "last hired, first fired" policy. This limited female employees to a temporary status, and reassured concerned male workers that the women would be quickly disposed of at war's end.[13]

In a limited way, union membership helped as well as hindered women workers. From the beginning of the war when only 800,000 of all wage-earning women were unionized, their numbers increased to over three million, and their portion of all union membership went from 9.4 percent to 22 percent.[14] Whatever improvements there were in wages, maternity and sick leave policies, child care provisions, and safety and health standards, were made because unions were obliged to address the grievances of dues-paying members, no matter who they were. Ever mindful of the trouble-making abilities of the Department of Labor Bureau's Women's Bureau, union leadership found it expedient to assuage women's

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[11]Ibid., 289-90; Wolfson, 49-50.

[12]Ibid., 50-51.

[13]Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work'. . .," 360-61.

[14]Kessler-Harris, 291.

complaints, "for the duration."[15] Just as the unconditional union recruitment campaigns of the Depression eventually benefitted women employed in the nondurable industries, the circumstances created by the war emergency produced similar results for the women working in such durable goods sectors as the electrical industries, where women employees predominated. Because the tedious hand assembly work marked the electrical industry as "women's work," men avoided those jobs. As a result, female electrical plant workers escaped the postwar layoffs and retained most of their wartime, union-sponsored gains.[16]

The women workers who entered the male bastions of heavy industry were not so fortunate. Most were unable to hold onto their wartime positions in "men's" jobs, much less the benefits. Was this entirely due to the defensive efforts of a traditional male opposition, or were there other factors which undermined women's original motivations for trying nontraditional occupations? In the search for answers, historians have analyzed such "hard" evidence as demographic, labor and economic data collected both during and after the war, but there was also a large quantity of evidence in the form of manpower recruitment literature and formal written and oral testimonies of wartime workers. These sources offered a view of American attitudes that statistical analysis could not, but could the evidence provide the researcher with the clues he or she needed to pinpoint the motivating forces behind women's labor force participation trends?

The prevailing attitudes towards women were displayed in the government's manpower recruiting campaign. Once the male and female unemployed and retired workers were reemployed, and others encouraged to switch from civilian to war

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[15]Ibid., 291-92.

[16]Milkman, *Gender at Work . . .*, 73-83.

production, there was still a worrisome labor shortage to contend with. By mid-1942, the government was forced to revise its traditional stance on working married women. The official line went from praising women for remaining home or volunteering for community service, to criticizing them for shirking their patriotic duty to work in war production plants.[17] The War Manpower Commission proclaimed that "women must be induced to change their customary life pattern of school, a few years of work, marriage and children. Some must remain in jobs, others must go to work."[18] To bring this about, a massive mobilization drive was launched to recruit housewives, the largest remaining source of untapped labor.

Initial efforts to lure married women into the labor force were still inclined to exempt mothers from responsibility. One Public Affairs Pamphlet author, Katherine Glover, was careful to note that while married women must step in to fill the jobs in war production, the WMC had also issued the following Directive No. IX:

> Existing and anticipated requirements for workers in essential activities render necessary the employment of large numbers of women, that among such women may be found many mothers of young children, that no woman responsible for the care of young children should be encouraged or compelled to seek employment which deprives her children of her essential care until after all other sources of labor supply have been exhausted.[19]

The same order went on to state that if such women were employed, "adequate

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[17]Kessler-Harris, 275.

[18]D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 96.

[19]Katherine Glover, *Women at Work in Wartime* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 1943), 14.

provision for the care of such children will facilitate their employment."[20] While reconfirming that "the first responsibility of women with young children, in war as in peace, is to give suitable care in their own homes to their children," and promising that a call for the employment of mothers would be avoided "until use has been made of all other sources of labor supply," the WMC also added a final clause. "Barriers against the employment of women with young children," they warned, "should not be set up by employers." Instead, the government asserted, "the decision as to gainful employment should in all cases be an individual decision made by the woman herself in the light of the particular conditions prevailing in her home."[21]

The contradictory nature of this order exemplified much of what appeared throughout government publications and the popular media. There were a great many assurances that the old values and behaviors were as valid as ever. Yet at the same time, these spokespersons asked people to think and behave in radically new ways. For example, the pamphlet went on to encourage communities to set up child care centers so that working mothers would be freed to serve their nation. Recent studies have shown that by the 1940s, Americans linked institutionalized child care with welfare and social deviancy, and would have needed time to accept its propriety under the best of circumstances.[22] The government also reflected this sentiment by offering a minimum amount of support for institutionalized child care, either in actions or in words. It was only after the lack

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[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, *Who's Minding the Children: The History and Politics of Day Care in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 67, 247.

of child care facilities became a real obstacle in the recruitment of women workers that the 1942 and 1943 allocation of Lanham Act funds was provided for the building and operation of day care centers. Local communities were required to come up with 50 percent of the total cost first, and they were also informed that they would be subjected to yearly audits to ensure that local governments were not defrauding the federal government. Not surprisingly, many communities decided the costs were too high for something few people approved of to begin with.[23] Some companies became so desperate for workers that they established their own on-site day care centers. Both the Curtiss-Wright Corporation of Buffalo and the Kaiser Corporation of Oregon had child care centers which were frequently praised in much of the recruitment literature as fine examples of caring employers.[24] Despite the rosy assurances, however, the truth was that even at their enrollment peak in the spring of 1945, federally funded child care centers served only 100,000 children, or less than 10 percent of those needing it. A Women's Bureau survey of ten war production plants found that only one out of ten working mothers sent her children to any type of institutionalized day care.[25]

Still, determined manpower campaigns persisted in treating child care and other troublesome issues as though they were easily surmountable obstacles. Most of the recruiting methods projected a relentlessly confident optimism about the average woman's capability of filling "men's" jobs in heavy industry. Specifically, there was a determined effort made to ease what recruiters felt were

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[23]Chafe, *Paradox*, 148-51.

[24]Glover, 18; Skold, 59.

[25]Chafe, *Paradox*, 150-51.

women's fears about "rough," "masculine" factory jobs. Early in the war, the Women's Bureau put out a pamphlet entitled "What Job is Mine on the Victory Line?" In this encouraging promotion of war jobs, women were prodded by what became a commonly used recruitment sales pitch:

> If you've sewed on buttons, or made buttonholes on a machine,
> You can learn to do spot welding on airplane parts.
> If you've used an electric mixer in your kitchen,
> You can learn to run a drill press.
> If you've followed recipes exactly in making cake,
> You can learn to load shells.[26]

Other attempts to demystify the supposedly intimidating "man's" world of heavy industry included what several recruiters believed was of paramount concern to women considering factory work:

> There is hardly a woman who is considering going to work in a factory, or is about to go to work in one, who isn't going to ask, and perhaps a little tremulously, "But what shall I wear?" You must admit, for it is a well established fact, that you are a vain creature. And all the factory jobs in the country, whatever their compensations, would not appeal to you if you had to appear before your fellow workers wearing some "simply horrid looking thing!". . . The designers of the uniforms . . . that the well-dressed factory worker will wear are in the majority of instances, themselves women, and are fully aware of what will appeal to milady's eye."[27]

There were the firsthand testimonies of female journalists like Nell Giles. On assignment as a feature writer for the *Boston Globe,* she took a factory war job in a General Electric machine plant in West Lynn, Massachusetts. In her first article, she claimed that she was taking the job "to write the glamour out of women in war. Too many articles about women in war are

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[26]Eva Lapin, *Mothers in Overalls* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, Inc., 1943), 6.

[27]Laura Nelson Baker, *Wanted: Women in War Industry-The Complete Guide to a War Factory Job* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1943), 89.

written by people who've never been a woman in war."[28] Despite this premise, however, she proceeded to accentuate the glamorous aspects of a factory job. She was also anxious to debunk the highly publicized predictions that factory work would "defeminize" women:

> It is a mistake to think it impossible to be a gentlewoman on a factory work-bench. Women are changing, yes; but why can't a feminine CHARACTER be substituted for a feminine HAT. (Yes, I know it isn't as much fun!) If we are to have less perfume and lipstick and nail polish and pink underwear, then let us have MORE daintiness and good grooming and gentleness and womanly character.[29]

There had been rumors that men in war factories were physically aggressive, but it was Giles' opinion that none of the "guys" were wolves when they started out. They became so only after the girls teased or "mugged" them into lecherous behavior.[30] Women, she seemed convinced, were solely responsible for the type of atmosphere they worked in, and had nothing to worry about if they behaved themselves.

The upbeat tone and simplistic language of Giles' newspaper articles could be found throughout manpower recruitment pamphlets, newsfilm clips, motion pictures, radio messages and magazine advertisements. Most observers believed the media blitz was responsible for the initially successful employment increases. By May of 1942, Helen Baker, Assistant Director of the Industrial Relations Section of the Department of Economics and Social Institutions, seemed convinced. "Present indications are," she reported, "that newspaper and radio publicity has 'glamorized' industrial defense work to such an extent that in some communities

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[28]Nell Giles, *Punch In, Susie!: A Woman's War Factory Diary* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1943), 1.

[29]Ibid., 78-79.

[30]Ibid., 60.

the flood of women applicants has been almost embarrassing to the employment offices and war industries."[31] She also noted that this had occurred while many companies were still refusing to hire mothers of young children, or women over thirty or thirty-five years of age.[32] But this initial rush to war factories began to taper off by 1943, and women were increasingly being criticized both for their avoidance of war jobs, and their escalating absentee and "quit" rates.

While interviewing members of the War Manpower Commission for an article she was writing for the New York newspaper, *PM,* Elizabeth Hawes asked a woman representative why she thought women were not volunteering for war work. "The women are unpatriotic," the woman replied, and what is more, she believed that the women who did work were "just doing it for the money!"[33] In the media, Manpower Commission officials lashed out against "bridge-playing women" who did "only" volunteer work with the Red Cross.[34] Also during this time, reporters asked Paul McNutt, the War Manpower Commission Chairman, why an increasing number of women were leaving their war jobs, and what could be done about it. He reportedly "shrugged his shoulders," and remarked that women were always changing their minds.[35] Others delved deeper for the causes of the increasing absentee and "quit" rates among women factory workers.

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[31]Helen Baker, *Women in War Industries* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1942), 11.

[32]Ibid., 12-14.

[33]Elizabeth Hawes, *Why Women Cry or Wenches with Wrenches* (Cornwall, New York: Cornwall Press, 1943), 54.

[34]Lapin, 8.

[35]Ibid., 11.

Between October 1941, and February 1942, an early study of women working in war industries was conducted by the Industrial Relations Section of the Department of Economics. After collecting information from sixty-two companies in the United States and Britain, they found that women's turnover and absentee rates were no different from the men's when the firms required forty hour work weeks. However, when companies switched to more than forty hour weeks this unfailingly brought higher female absentee and "quit" rates, especially among married women with children. These women showed a tendency to miss Mondays and Fridays, and displayed a preference for second and third shift work because it enabled them to tend to both children and chores during the day. From this, British industry executives concluded that it was "home duties and family responsibilities" which caused women to miss work, and that offering better child care arrangements and no more than forty hour work weeks to those who required them were the most sensible deterrents to high turnover and absenteeism.[36]

In the United States, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins asked the Women's Bureau to formulate a list of standard requirements which would ensure both the successful integration and retention of women workers within war production plants.[37] Their recommendations began with the suggestion that employers use female employment officers, since they would be more likely to understand the "special" needs of women workers. Among these "special" needs were: toilets for women in locations convenient to workrooms, at a ratio of at least one toilet for every fifteen women; dressing rooms and washing facilities with soap and individual towels; and, conveniently located lunchrooms where food could

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[36]Helen Baker, 3-10, 29-34, 41.

[37]Mary Anderson, 248.

be purchased at reasonable rates.[38] Also important, they felt, was the necessity for weight lifting limits for women, and a modification of production lines to include conveyors, mechanical lifters, and seating wherever possible to ease the strain of jobs requiring workers to stand for hours on end.[39] The report went on to mention that "women prefer not . . . to work near or in areas with hazardous dusts, fumes or excessive noise," and that they may "show more susceptibility . . . than men . . . to certain materials . . . such as lead."[40]

Were the harsh working conditions in war factories as discouraging to working women as their worries about child care and housekeeping responsibilities? No one knew for sure, but as the war continued and the labor shortage became more severe, women's irregular fluctuations into and out of the labor force began to draw more attention. In its effort to discover why women were quitting their war jobs at an increasing rate, the government sent Augusta Clawson to work as a welder in the Kaiser Corporation's Swan Island shipyard in Oregon. Her report was interesting because, as an agent of the government, she was caught in a difficult position. She had to appear honest in her appraisal of the shipyard working environment, but she also could not be so critical as to scare prospective female workers away.

During her training and working experiences, Clawson did indeed try to toe the government line on optimism, but she also included a few subjective reflections into her narrative. To begin with, she admitted to a "feminine"

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[38]Ibid., 53-54.

[39]Ibid., 50-53.

[40]Ibid., 53, 56.

aversion to wearing work clothes outside of the factory, but reluctantly gave in to practicality when changing at the factory proved too inconvenient.[41] Although she tried to present men co-workers in the best possible light, she did not disguise her annoyance with what she considered to be subtle attempts by men to make things unpleasant for women. For example, her supervisor repeatedly sent her on errands that required her to scale the highest and most dangerous sections of the ship. Or he assigned her welding jobs which could be performed only in painfully contorted positions, or while holding a heavy welding torch overhead for hours on end.[42] She quoted one "middle-aged" woman welder who complained, "I'll tell you I'm sick of it all. The men don't want you there. They say, 'I wouldn't have my wife work here.' And they just try to wear you out and make you quit. . . ."[43] Because Clawson was on a limited government assignment, she stayed on her shipyard job for only a few months, but by the time she left she was voicing some pessimistic sentiments about male co-workers.[44]

Aside from the discouragements that male co-workers were provoking in women, Clawson made it clear that a shipyard was a very rough and boring place to work. The constant, ear-splitting noise within a ship under construction was almost unbearable, and the unavoidable exposure to summer heat and winter cold made the physically taxing nature of the work even more exhausting. Clawson also observed that workers were often careless, creating dangerous working situations

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[41]Augusta H. Clawson, *Shipyard Diary of a Woman Welder* (New York: Penguin Books, 1944), vii, viii, 9-16.

[42]Ibid., 63-64, 70, 123, 137.

[43]Ibid., 105.

[44]Ibid., 145.

which sometimes led to fatal accidents.[45] Such a working environment, Clawson observed, did not attract women who were able to obtain jobs in other less strenuous war production areas. The women she worked with were usually from poor backgrounds and had already been hardened by physical labor. Clawson especially noted that few had had much education, and commented that "certainly no one suspects I have two degrees. I wonder if they think I even got to high school."[46] This, she said, may have been responsible for the fatalistic attitude she found among these women. They complained to her about nurseries that did not open until 7:00 A.M., though their shifts began at 6:00 A.M., and about the lack of toilet facilities, cafeterias or restaurants, or adequate outside housing. But they also told her that "in this sort of work one just takes what comes, and that's all there is to it."[47] She found that "almost none of the women I talk with complain of too much housework after work. They seem to have turned it over to daughters or mothers or they eat out a lot. Many do their shopping on the way home, dirt and all."[48] Only one woman told her that her husband split the housework with her, "out of fairness."[49]

As for the reasons these women had for working, Clawson most often heard women discussing "the good pay." They also said that they had family members in the Army and that they wanted to help end the war, or that they simply became restless at home after "the boys" left for war. One female worker told Clawson

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[45]Ibid., 57-59, 65-67, 120.

[46]Ibid., 94-95.

[47]Ibid., 30, 34, 53.

[48]Ibid., 83.

[49]Ibid., 87.

that what women wanted most of all was for the war to end, so they could "all get out and leave the Yard to the men again."[50]

Clawson concluded her report by addressing the issue of working mothers. "Most women said they would never work with a baby at home. Those who did had a baby-sitters who took as good care of them as they would."[51] She also noted that after an announcement was made that a nursery school was to be opened at the Yard, it was met with little enthusiasm until mothers were assured that the care would be excellent, and that it was not a "charity thing."[52] However, Clawson cautioned:

> If you have children under fourteen, stop and consider seriously before you sign up for a war job. Aren't those children your first responsibility? Can't you care for them and do your bit through part-time work in civilian service organizations? It is for those who do not have the responsibility of young children to make a serious effort [to work].[53]

Clawson's opinions were important, because most of her suggestions on the establishment of counseling and training programs for women defense workers were quickly adopted by the government. These proved so successful that within a matter of months labor statistics showed that the turnover rate for women production workers was only slightly higher than that of men.[54]

In another shipyard study, sociologist Katherine Archibald worked for two years as a warehouse clerk for the Moore Dry Dock Company in Oakland, California. She was interested in the ideological, rather than the functional,

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[50]Ibid., 113.

[51]Ibid., 156.

[52]Ibid., 165.

[53]Ibid., 180.

[54]Skold, 57.

consequences of the shipyard workers' cooperative experience. In her introduction, she said that she "had come to the shipyards as an academician and a liberal whose experience with the social problems of America had been gained in libraries. . . ."[55] This, she added, had not prepared her for what she found:

> I discovered that the magnitude of fact dwarfed my simple preconceptions. Where logic and liberal theory had promised some sense of unity among the shipyard workers, derived from their common interests and common status, I found in actuality differences and gaps--social abysses so deep that the possibility of spanning them never occurred, apparently, to right-minded people reared after a righteous custom. I found intolerance . . . so great that the ghosts of feudal snobbery seemed to have come alive. I found insularities so narrow as scarcely to be believed.[56]

War production areas attracted many types of people from all over the country, but as Archibald discovered, they were prone to dwell on differences far more than commonalities. This was observed by Archibald in the daily interactions, and frictions, between various ethnic and religious groups, and working-class locals and transients. It was also apparent in male and female working relationships, where Archibald was able to discern only the slightest relaxation in traditional beliefs. She was struck by the low level of education most of the people seemed to have, and she surmised that this had much to do with their suspicion of new ideas. For one, people seemed convinced that any change in the "proper division of labor between men and women" would also lead to a change in the divisions in biological functions.[57] In fact, she said:

> Whatever the degree of adjustment, whatever the outward appearance of harmony, the ancient doctrine was never wholly abandoned--that the real and only power of women was the power of sex and that their sole possible contribution to the

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[55]Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), 5.

[56]Ibid., 6.

[57]Ibid., 6-15.

> field of masculine endeavor was one of negative distraction and disturbance rather than positive aid.[58]

The men assumed a formally polite facade during the two years that Archibald observed them. "But underneath the formality and politeness, a half-concealed resentment still persisted. . . ." Archibald did not feel, however, that their anger was entirely ideological. She also sensed that women were perceived as being "rivals of men in a man's world."[59] "Even the young male is not greeted with unqualified enthusiasm by established workers, but is forced to thread his way through the maze of apprenticeship before he arrives at full status. . . ."[60] Mostly, Archibald felt that the "masculine antagonism constituted a vague and emotion-charged atmosphere rather than any well-defined and rational position."[61] She believed that a perceived threat to the male ego also explained why the men overwhelmingly associated a working wife or daughter with economic and personal failure.[62]

Because of these challenges to masculinity, "women were only grudgingly admitted into the union," she said. Even then it was "only with the tacitly implied understanding that it was to last only as long as the emergency situation," and that at war's end both the union affiliation and women's jobs would end together.[63] Archibald also heard men express the opinion that no

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[58]Ibid., 18.

[59]Ibid., 17.

[60]Ibid., 24.

[61]Ibid., 17.

[62]Ibid., 23.

[63]Ibid., 25.

woman deserved equal pay, and much resentment was voiced over the sudden improvements made in working conditions and wages when the women were brought in.[64] Promotions, she added, were just about impossible for women. "So far as came to my knowledge, women at Moore Dry Dock did not pass beyond the status of journeyman to the supervisory positions of leaderman or quarterman except in the despised craft of the general laborer." Men simply refused to work under a woman's direction, no matter how qualified she was for the supervisory position.[65]

Although Archibald gave the men a thorough drubbing in her report, she was no less critical of women workers. From what she could see, some women gave the men reason to scorn them:

> Many women were no more than young and adventuresome girls, their normal boy-centered lives rent asunder by war, who turned to the shipyards primarily for excited roving among droves of draft-exempt men. The older women were often merely fleeing the housewives routine, which had grown dull over the years.[66]

She also added something else about housewives by saying that, "for them too, the function of the shipyard, aside from supplying the weekly pay check, was to provide release from emotional frustration and satisfy vague personal hungers."[67] Archibald never explained how or why she had come to this conclusion, but the wondering nature of the comment was similar to those made by the Lynds in their "Middletown" study.

Archibald said that women who did not work in the shipyards often

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[64]Ibid., 27-28.

[65]Ibid., 29.

[66]Ibid., 31-32.

[67]Ibid., 32.

suspected those working with their men of having ulterior motives, even to the point of accusing them of prostitution; but again, Archibald said, the women workers did not help matters. In her opinion, many did dress in knowingly suggestive ways, and "philandering did occur . . . and homes were broken. . . ."[68] Archibald added that "still another masculine indictment was well supported by observable fact":

> Women in the shipyards, even while they assumed the rights of equality, also cherished the privileges of the protected status. . . . Seldom did a sense of responsibility to the job obstruct this desire to ease through the working day. Looking upon their work as temporary--a respite preceding either marriage or the return of the drafted husband, women for the most part had little impulse to delve into the secrets of their craft or to work any harder than was absolutely necessary.[69]

Yet she added, in fairness this was probably due to the women's reaction to the frustrating barriers that men had erected against female advancements. Their behavior may have also been caused by an unspoken belief in women's inferiority within a technological world:

> Few women would have disputed seriously the masculine claim of their inferiority in the industrial arts, and even fewer, however much they might hope to have the chance, actually expected that they would continue in their shipyard crafts once the pressure of war should be relaxed.[70]

As a whole, Archibald said, women worked hard and well, and by the end of the war men were forced to acknowledge this. Some men did change in their attitudes, and some women did learn to respect their work and achieve the necessary professionalism that men were expected to have.[71] However:

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[68]Ibid., 19-21, 32.

[69]Ibid., 33.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Ibid., 35-39.

> although the conventional alignment of the two sexes was rudely shaken in the shipyard situation and some of the barriers between their separate spheres were displaced and weakened, there was no evidence that principles of unity were established by this period of disturbance which were strong enough to withstand the backwash to old and earnestly cherished distinctions.[72]

Like Clawson, Archibald saw one particular factor which affected women's commitment to working careers. "Many who liked their jobs and their economic independence were still torn by their feelings about their second role as wife and mother." During her daily conversations with the other women workers, the author most often heard women support the belief that women really belonged at home.[73]

Another woman investigator who was primarily interested in the war plant's potential for fostering cooperative unity among workers was Elizabeth Hawes. After hearing the critical statements of the War Manpower Commission members on women's "unpatriotic" and "greedy" motives for working in war plants, she decided to see if such claims were true. *PM* granted her the assignment, and she entered the Wright Aeronautical Corporation's aircraft plant in Patterson, New Jersey.[74]

As early as her training, she got a preview of what she could expect. She and the women in her class were immediately informed by a male instructor that women had no place in a machine shop. Another instructor "busied himself persuading the females they would lose their femininity if they wore slacks. So women went to work in dresses and heels," until "reality changed that right

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[72]Ibid., 39.

[73]Ibid. 33-34.

[74]Hawes, 57-58, 53-54.

away."[75] Once she completed her training and entered the machine shop, "girls" who had been working there for over a year told her not to wear herself out. After all, she was told, the men did not want them to learn the craft, they "merely wanted them to run the machine." However, Hawes' supervisor insisted that she learn everything, including how to set-up and adjust her machine. He was "rather young," and she noticed that it was the older men who seemed most resistent to the women's presence in the machine shop.[76] During her stay, she said she often overheard the men singing to themselves: "Women--women--women--what's going to happen after the war? Will the men ever get their jobs back?"[77]

Hawes did not comment on whether or not the women found this type of psychological warfare intimidating. However, she was warned not to complain by another female worker named Jessie. "Just do what you're told, keep your mouth shut, be polite and do your work."[78] Jessie also advised against joining the union, but when Hawes and another new woman worker were promoted over her even though she had been there longer, she quickly changed her mind. Jessie, Hawes related with amusement, joined the union and thereafter dropped her weary passive attitude for a new stern disposition.[79]

Not so humorous to Hawes were "the little happenings at the plant which showed a traditional disrespect for female abilities." Women workers were:

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[75]Ibid., 60.

[76]Ibid., 75.

[77]Ibid., 95.

[78]Ibid., 105.

[79]Ibid., 105, 145-49.

> continuously treated like children; never asked or helped to grow up. . . . Someone decided what clothes we should wear; we had counsellors to look after us as if we were in prepschool; men mustn't swear in front of us because we were too special to take it; we were bad girls to use our brother's tool boxes, [but we mustn't own our own].[80]

Just as Archibald had asserted, Hawes believed that women often asked for this disrespect by retaliating "in childish fashion by crying; by sulking and not speaking to one another; by telling tales and complaining to foremen or other bosses." She also believed that many women persisted in using sex to manipulate the men around them, rather than achieving goals the hard way through professionalism and hard work.[81]

Unlike other observers of women war workers, Hawes tended to minimize the possibility that child care and housekeeping responsibilities stood as a real hindrance to women's nontraditional ambitions. She did admit that of all the problems discussed by the women, the provision of quality child care ranked as number one. They also spent a great deal of time worrying over their inability to get enough sleep, for all had shopping, cooking and cleaning to do after work hours. But the optimistic Hawes did not see why these obstacles should be considered insoluble.[82] Men and women should simply "re-organize the running of the American home," she reasoned, "so that the time spent on work, child care and housekeeping activities were equalized and shared." Was the idea so fantastic, she asked?[83]

After her experiences in the war factory, Hawes obtained a job as an

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[80]Ibid., 134, 150-51.

[81]Ibid., 151, 158.

[82]Ibid., 136-37.

[83]Ibid., 152.

International Representative of the UAW-CIO, and thereafter discovered one of the primary reasons her "sensible" solution was far from being realized. During one particular sparsely attended meeting of women union members, an excited member told Hawes and her other organizer friend that "she was very encouraged about the attitude of the men in the union. A short time before, the men had allowed the women union members to cook and serve them dinner after the big meeting." Avoiding one another's eyes, Hawes related, she and her friend replied that "that was fine," and then tried to sound sincere while telling them to "keep up the good work."[84]

Hawes worked in a war factory for professional reasons, but there were others who apparently did it simply for the experience. One such woman was the European aristocrat, Josephine von Miklos, who left her successful business as a commercial photographer and designer in New York City to work in a nearby munitions plant and shipyard during the war.[85]

While she was applying for her first job in the munitions factory, she told the female personnel director that she held a Ph.D. in history and art history from the University of Vienna. She was promptly advised to keep this information to herself. "I have a doctor of psychology," the director confided to her, "and I've been sitting on it too. I don't believe that the workers would appreciate this kind of education."[86] Once on the job, she realized that few of the women were likely to have had more than a high school education,

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[84]Ibid., 3, 42.

[85]Josephine von Miklos, *I Took a War Job* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943), 5-6.

[86]Ibid., 20.

and like Archibald and Hawes, concluded that this was responsible for the debilitating fatalism most of them exhibited. They did not join the union because the women workers expressed the belief that it was "all a racket, anyway," and von Miklos was barely able to coax them into petitioning for decent toilet and cafeteria facilities.[87] She also discovered, "to her surprise," that the women workers were not very interested in the war. They were interested in the pay, and what it could buy, such as a house. The wealthy von Miklos found this hard to understand.[88] She also did not make the connection between the women's lethargic attitude toward work and the fact that the men were always "too busy" to do anything which helped women workers, or that her many painstaking petitions disappeared once the boss accepted them.[89]

von Miklos was determined to be different, and after much hard work became the first woman to be promoted to the tool-grinding room. She said that the other women were shocked that she wanted to work that hard, because "it ain't women's work."[90] von Miklos moved into the grinding room where she was immediately met with staring men. "As far as they were concerned, I was a freak. They wanted to find out, in the worst way, what made me tick."[91] However, she did master the craft, and the men eventually became accustomed enough to her to help and even praise her. In return, she also came to admire the men for their commitment to their work. These men inevitably disappeared into the service,

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[87]Ibid., 32, 62-64.

[88]Ibid., 77-78.

[89]Ibid., 61, 64.

[90]Ibid., 89-91.

[91]Ibid., 92-95.

and von Miklos said that she did not like working with the women who replaced them. She found it difficult to tolerate their lack of interest in the craft, and she decided to leave the munitions plant for a shipyard job.[92]

Once there, she was quick to inform the female reader that working in a shipyard was the roughest, most dangerous work any woman could take on.[93] She also found that in the shipyard she admired the women and disliked the men. Women, she noted, wore baggy, masculine clothes for more than safety and comfort. It was also done to keep the "water-front Casanovas" from harassing them. Both Archibald and Hawes commented upon this as well.[94] Further, von Miklos complained, the men did not "show the slightest sign of knowing that women are people too." She and the other women workers came to the "inescapable conclusion that most of these men have never in all their lives ever thought of a woman as anything but something that you go to bed with." However, she noticed that it was the older men who were the culprits. "We haven't had any kind of trouble with the young kids, who are, apparently, more used to thinking and acting in terms of a more casual relationship between the sexes."[95] von Miklos was as irritated as Hawes was by the shipyard women's counselor who had been hired "to take care of us." She was also angered by the lectures that "this pretty female" gave the women about *their* misbehavior, which were invariably accompanied by hints of dismissal.[96]

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[92]Ibid., 100-113, 119, 176-77.

[93]Ibid., 177-81.

[94]Ibid., 186; Archibald, 21-22; Hawes, 60-75, 90.

[95]Ibid., von Miklos, 186-88.

[96]Ibid., 191.

The lack of administrative support became more important to von Miklos when the shop bully, Ivan, decided to make her life miserable. She bravely withstood his terrorizing tactics for months, but was beginning to lose her fighting spirit when he miraculously retired. She discovered afterward that she had won the respect of her male co-workers who were secretly rooting for her all along. von Miklos was heartened by this new approval, and it seemed never to have occurred to her to resent them for their watchful silence during her many months of suffering. Like the women union members Hawes encountered, she was happy to win the approval of "the guys."[97]

In another wartime diary, Mary Beatty Trask, writing under the pseudonym of Ann Pendleton, displayed this desire for male approval as well. She went to work for the Kerry Kraft Aircraft plant near New York, and eventually became a riveter. She was a college student who was working toward a Ph.D. in psychology, but she said that she did not want her new friends at work to know about this. Though she "thought" most of the women had gone through high school, the speech of the workers was mostly slang, and she went to some pains to sound like them, since "proper" language was quickly noticed and commented upon.[98] Later on, Trask commented that some of the women she worked with were "extraordinarily ignorant . . . circumscribed in their lives and in their outlook. . . ." But she was quick to add that they were also friendly, generous and accepting of the rights of others, something "some of my more sophisticated friends [in New

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[97]Ibid., 201-10.

[98]Ann Pendleton, *Hit the Rivet Sister* (New York: Howell, Soskin, Publishers, Inc., 1943), 17-18, 33, 59, 132.

York] might do well to emulate."[99]

This eagerness to appear charitable was extended toward the men as well. For instance, she noted that "the 'fellers' live in a wonderful atmosphere of homage and appreciated superiority," and that their attitude "towards us females is a mixture of exasperation and indulgence." However, she assured her readers, the indulgence usually triumphed. Women just had to be careful, especially in the manner in which they suggested new ideas or ways of doing things. She learned to accomplish this in a manner that was nonchalant and unboastful, and which *never* showed up a male worker.[100]

Not so ready to excuse the men for their superior attitudes were two teachers, Constance Bowman and Clara M. Allen, who took war jobs in an aircraft plant in San Diego during summer vacation in 1944. Both inside and outside of the factory, they were surprised and then angered to discover that even the slightest change in the status quo brought an uncomfortable amount of attention. While riding the bus to work in their work slacks, they were shocked to discover that men who formerly offered them seats suddenly refused to do so. Women outside the plant also showed open hostility toward them, and store clerks avoided waiting on them. Neither could believe, they said, what a difference such a simple change could bring about in peoples' behavior.[101]

Once they began working as riveters, their boss was openly hostile to them. He explained things "slowly and twice as if I were a not-too-bright child," Bowman recounted. He asked her to sweep up in a friendly manner, and she felt

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[99]Ibid., 170-71.

[100]Ibid., 147-50.

[101]Constance Bowman and Clara Marie Allen, *Slacks and Callouses* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944), 67-74.

relieved, until she learned that being asked to do this job was considered the lowest of insults. Eventually, she decided that her boss actually seemed to enjoy giving her the most difficult jobs he could find.[102] Other male co-workers vented their displeasure by being perpetually annoyed with the women worker's inexperience.[103]

After becoming acquainted with their female co-workers, Bowman and Allen were amazed to discover how many of them had not graduated from high school, but wanted to go back because they regretted their lack of education. Most said they had migrated to San Diego from small towns, and had quit school to come where the jobs were. While on break, Bowman and Allen most often heard the women worrying over child care problems, and all said that they had difficulties handling their responsibilities at work and home.[104]

By the time their summer in the aircraft plant was over, the English and Art teachers were ready to return to their regular jobs. They were proud of the part they had played in building war planes, but they were also happy that their livelihoods were not dependent upon factory jobs.[105] In fact, none of the women whose experiences have been mentioned so far actually needed the income from their war jobs. All were professional women who took factory jobs either as an investigative assignment, or as a quest for personal fulfillment. However, historians have collected other testimonies which offer additional insights into the reasons women took nontraditional jobs, and how those experiences affected

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[102]Ibid., 37, 91-94.

[103]Ibid., 93-94.

[104]Ibid., 150.

[105]Ibid., 173-75.

their attitudes and behavior.

During the early 1980s, Sherna Berger Gluck conducted an extensive oral history survey of women who had worked in the aircraft industries in Los Angeles during World War II. An initial list of two hundred and twelve former aircraft workers was pared down to forty-five representative cases, whose comprehensive life histories were recorded and studied by Gluck. Finally, the author chose to publish the accounts of ten women, six of whom were white, three of whom were Hispanic, and one of whom was African-American. Though time and space made the recording and publication of all the respondents' histories impossible, Gluck asserted that the final ten life stories could be regarded as fairly representa-sentative of all the women interviewed for the project.[106]

Of the ten women, all except Betty Boggs, who was seventeen years old and living with her parents when the war began, went to work because they were self-supporting, needed to pay off Depression debts, or were saving for a house. All of them mentioned how the pervasive manpower media campaign affected their decision to take war jobs. Juanita Loveless' account was typical:

> Everyday someone came in saying, "Do you want a job?" My head was going crazy. They were recruiting for any kind of work you wanted. Newspapers, just splashed everywhere: "Help Wanted," "Help Wanted," "Jobs," "Jobs," "Jobs." Propaganda on every radio station: "If you're an American citizen, come to gate so-and-so"--at Lockheed or at the shipyards in San Pedro. And they did it on the movie screens when they'd pass the collection cans. You were bombarded. . . . They didn't care whether you were black, white, young, old. They didn't really care if you could work. It got even worse in '43. I worked two jobs for a long time. . . . my mind was dazzled with all the offers I had.[107]

Margarita Salazar McSweyn remembered that her east Los Angeles barrio

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[106]Gluck, 276-77.

[107]Ibid., 135.

was bursting with billboards written in Spanish, and that the Spanish-language paper, *La Opinion,* carried daily stories about women defense workers.[108] While she and the other women remembered being influenced by stories about how much money factory workers were being paid, every one of the ten women was careful to emphasize their patriotic motives as well.

Five of the ten were married, and every one but Tina Hill, who was an African-American, worked over the objections of their husbands.[109] In the case of Susan Laughlin, who worked as a Woman's Counselor at Lockheed from July 1942 until the end of the war, her husband not only disliked her working but would not allow her to talk about it:

> My husband didn't want me to work when he was able to keep me at home. Of course, during the war, there wasn't any question about it because everybody was needed. But he didn't like me to talk about my work. If we went out and anybody asked me about it, he would prefer to answer. I think he felt that it was his failure that made it necessary and he didn't like to be reminded of it.[110]

Gluck added that Mr. Laughlin's apparent inability to find and hold on to a job, both during and after the war, may have been the source of Susan's husband's resentment over her successes.[111] Yet she was still maintaining a dutiful silence when Gluck spoke with her in the early 1980s. "I was surprised to learn," Gluck recounted, "that this was one of the first occasions that Susan had talked to anybody about her job as a counselor during the war. In order to keep the peace in her household and to placate her husband, she had downplayed her

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[108]Ibid., 71.

[109]Ibid., 163, 187, 209, 254.

[110]Gluck, 254.

[111]Ibid., 245, 255.

role."[112] Other women commented on the reactions of their families as well as their husbands. Charlcia Neuman remembered that her youngest brother "thought it was terrible," and, "my father, oh, he was very upset. He said, 'You can't work amongst people like that.' They were people like me, but they thought it was people that were rough and not the same type I'm used to being with."[113] Neuman felt that she had little choice because she did not have the skills for other jobs. "Most of the women I knew, they went into stores and into that type of work. It was easier to do. They wouldn't go into the war plants." She decided to take the war job, and "my family thought I was a little off for doing it." Unlike Laughlin's case, her husband did not approve but eventually "got used to the fact that his wife worked."[114] Helen Studer said that while her husband accepted the fact that their poor financial state necessitated her working, he still preferred that she not work in a factory. She said that her education was limited, "so I didn't try to go in for any office work. I went into the industrial part of it."[115] Beatrice Morales Clifton said that her husband "hit the roof" when she told him that she wanted to work in a war plant. "He was one of those men that didn't believe in the wife ever working; they want to be the supporter." But she told him, and all of the "surprised" members of both their families, "'I've made up my mind. I'm going to work regardless of whether you like it or not.' I was determined."[116] As

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[112]Ibid., 244.

[113]Ibid., 163.

[114]Ibid., 164.

[115]Ibid., 186.

[116]Ibid., 208.

a young, single woman, Margarita Salazar McSweyn was chided by friends for her decision to leave her job as a beauty operator to work in a factory. "My girlfriends used to tell me, 'Why are you going to try that when you have this nice, clean job here?" But then "I guess I felt it was something new, why not try it. I knew I could always come back to what I was doing as long as I kept my operator's license."[117] Marie Baker said that she initially hesitated because "I had the impression that women were tough that worked in factories, and I was scared to death, hoping nobody would hit me. That was silly. But it didn't seem like nice people worked in factories."[118]

As each woman described the time she spent within the aircraft plants, some common details emerged. All remembered the almost unbearable noise, and the physically tiring nature of their jobs, but none described the type of work women performed as being mentally demanding. In fact, some of the jobs were so simple, Marie Baker asserted, that "morons" could have done them, and that made much of the work very boring. These, she said, were the jobs that the men invariably instructed the women to do.[119] Marye Stumph mastered those jobs so quickly that she eventually earned the right to a promotion to one of the skilled positions. "But the men got all up in arms. They didn't want any women on [a spot-welder] and they all protested. So I didn't get on the spot-welding machine," even though "it wasn't anything that anybody couldn't do." Even after the men left for the service and it became necessary to replace them with women, "they never did put women on the really big, number five lathes. . . . Class A

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[117]Ibid., 85.

[118]Ibid., 229.

[119]Ibid., 229-30.

machinists were still men. The women got to be Class B machinists."[120] After much hard work Marie Baker finally achieved a "leadgirl" position, but she was only permitted to supervise women workers, never men.[121] The situation was even less promising for African-American women. Tina Hill said:

> I was a good student, if I do say so myself. But I have found out through life, sometimes even if you're good, you just don't get the breaks if the color's not right. I could see where they made a difference in placing you in certain jobs. They had fifteen or twenty departments, but all the Negroes [at North American Aircraft] went to Department 17 because there was nothing but shooting and bucking rivets.[122]

Helen Studer also believed that at Douglas Aircraft:

> The men really resented the women very much, and in the beginning it was a little bit rough. You had to hold your head high and bat your eyes at 'em. You learned to swear like they did. . . . The men that you worked with, after a while, they realized that it was essential that the women worked there, 'cause there wasn't enough men and the women were doing a pretty good job. So the resentment eased. However, I always felt that they thought it wasn't your place to be there.[123]

Beatrice Morales Clifton related that at Lockheed:

> They put me way up in the back, putting little plate nuts and drilling holes. They put me with some guy--he was kind of a stinker, real mean. A lot of them guys at the time resented women coming into jobs, and they let you know about it. He says, "Well, have you ever done any work like this?" I said, "No." . . . So then time went on and I made a mistake. I messed up something, made a ding. He got so irritable with me, he says, "You're not worth the money Lockheed pays you." He couldn't have hurt me more if he would have slapped me.[124]

Susan Laughlin said that after she was promoted to the position of factory counselor, "the men did not want any part of me; they didn't want my help." But

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[120]Ibid., 63.

[121]Ibid., 230.

[122]Ibid., 38.

[123]Ibid., 187.

[124]Ibid., 209.

she patiently employed nonintrusive methods and managed to solve several problems with women workers that male supervisors were helpless to correct. She considered it a personal victory when the male supervisors eventually trusted her with more and more personnel matters.[125]

> When I first went into the factory, they thought I was going to be a threat to their authority. When they discovered that that was the farthest thing from my mind, they felt comfortable with me. Like one man said, "You're not a woman, you're just a worker."[126]

At one point, however, Laughlin became so frustrated by a male co-worker, that she wanted to leave:

> At that time I was working for John Fowle, who really thought that all the women belonged in the kitchen. He liked me and we got along all right, but he didn't like women working. He didn't want to do one thing that would help and that just could not go on.[127]

Laughlin remained until the end of the war, but it was clear that she and the other women had few doubts about the shaky status of their nontraditional wartime jobs. When Gluck asked the ten women how they felt about their postwar layoffs, she was admittedly disappointed by their responses. For instance, Marye Stumph, who was a thiry-four-year-old single mother at the time, related that:

> I didn't actually think too much about the future. Oh, occasionally I did worry about what I'd do when the war ended. I could have enjoyed an assembler job. I could have just gone on and made a career out of that. But I didn't think that there was anything like that available for women. It was just an emergency that they hired women in, and I didn't figure that there was enough chance finding anything to bother trying to keep in that line.[128]

Margarita McSweyn, who was a single twenty-eight-year-old, admitted that she was

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[125]Ibid., 246.

[126]Ibid.

[127]Ibid., 247.

[128]Ibid., 65.

thinking about leaving Lockheed even before the war was over. She was anxious to return to her old job as a beauty operator because:

> It was more my type of thing. I got to dress up entirely different, working more with women. Also, I figured, the war was just about over. Make your break now before all the girls will be looking for jobs. . . . At Lockheed I saw where I was going to stay, whereas over here [in a beauty shop] I had a chance of good opportunities advance.[129]

Charlcia Neuman, who was a married thirty-five-year-old with a young daughter, insisted that although most of the women were laid off at Vultee Aircraft after September 1945:

> It wasn't discriminatory; it was what they happened to have left. The idea was for the women to go back home. The women understood that. And the men had been promised their jobs when they came back. I was ready to go home. I was tired. I had looked forward to it because there were too many things that I wanted to do with my daughter. I knew that it would be coming and I didn't feel any let-down. The experience was interesting, but I couldn't have kept it up forever. It was too hard.[130]

Helen Studer was a married, forty-seven-year-old with grown children when she was laid off from Douglas Aircraft after the war:

> I was glad it was over. I wasn't working 'cause I wanted to. I was working 'cause I thought it was necessary. I thought, I'm going to stay home and be a housewife. My husband never wanted me to work in the first place. . . . I was happy to stay home and be a housewife. I still am. It was delightful to not be working.[131]

Marie Baker, who was a thirty-three-year-old single mother of one daughter, enjoyed her job at North American Aircraft, and said "If I hadn't married, I think I'd still be there." But, she had also met a man she loved, and "at the end of the war, I wasn't thinking about working again. I was just thinking of being a wife and maybe a mother, future mother. I wanted another child, but I was

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[129]Ibid., 90.

[130]Ibid., 169.

[131]Ibid., 192.

happy to be a housewife."[132] Tina Hill, who was a twenty-six-year-old war bride when the war ended, was not unhappy to leave her job at North American Aviation:

> It didn't bother me much--not thinking about it jobwise. I was just glad that the war was over. I didn't feel bad because my husband had a job and he also was eligible to go to school with his GI bill. So I really didn't have too many plans.[133]

Betty Boggs and Juanita Loveless, the two women who were teen-agers during the war, had already quit their factory jobs before the war ended, but their attitudes about their experiences could not have been more different. The nineteen-year-old Boggs enjoyed her job at Doaks Aircraft enough to seek employment in another factory after her family's move to Seattle. But twenty-year-old Juanita Loveless asserted that she left Vega Aircraft because she had had enough of a job she always despised.[134] Beatrice Clifton, who was a married thirty-year-old with with two young sons, was the only woman of the group who regretted the loss of her factory job. She was forced to quit before the end of the war when one of her sons developed a serious illness.[135]

As a counselor, thirty-three-year-old Susan Laughlin's views of the postwar layoffs reflected the impressions of someone who was well acquainted with the attitudes of the women employed at Lockheed:

> It was a general understanding that everyone was going to go home. They were just waiting for their release. And they were released in bunches. Even for the counselors, who thoroughly enjoyed what they were doing and were going to

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[132]Ibid., 233.

[133]Ibid., 41.

[134]Ibid., 141-43.

[135]Ibid., 212.

> continue to do something, there was no problem. They didn't expect anything else. It was an understood fact.[136]

Despite Laughlin's seemingly mild acquiescence to the postwar situation, she also talked about certain outside pressures which may have led to her, and the other womens', acceptance of the layoffs. As part of a program coordinating effort among various aircraft plant counselors, Laughlin participated in regular community meetings throughout the time of the war. Eventually, she became the Lockheed representative on several community boards and agencies concerned with women's issues, and this led her into some uncomfortable situations during the postwar layoffs:

> I was also working with the head of Public Relations, speaking to groups. They would ask Lockheed for a woman to come and speak about the women. There was a lot of animosity in the community against women who went to work. They thought these women should be home taking care of their children. I was trying to talk about the kind of problems that women had by going to work and how the fact that she was working didn't necessarily mean that she was neglecting her child.[137]

Even in the early 1980s when Gluck spoke with her, Laughlin displayed an instant defensiveness about this subject:

> I didn't neglect my children. I worked hard not to. I extended my life so that each child had their hour in court everyday. And they were well fed. I cooked all night. I had someone there after school until I got home. And then, as we developed the Child Care Centers, my children went there. They were not allowed to leave the playground, and there was enough activity provided for them that they enjoyed it. I've done all kinds of things so that my home was disrupted as little as possible. I felt that many, many women did that.[138]

She added that while the women in the audience were nonworking mothers, that did not mean that they were good mothers. "Maybe they were playing bridge and they

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[136]Ibid., 253.

[137]Ibid., 252.

[138]Ibid., 252-53.

weren't paying as much attention as a working mother."[139] Of the four women in the group who had had young children at home during their wartime working experiences, Laughlin was the only one who used institutionalized child care. Stumph, Neuman, and Studer all relied upon their mothers and other family members, and were quick to inform Gluck that they had taken great pains to insure that their children were never neglected. This was a sensitive subject, yet none of the women expressed similar regrets over the special arrangements and compromises each had made with respect to their housekeeping chores.

After the war, all but Juanita Loveless continued upon traditional paths. Of the six single women, every one except Mary Stumph married and had children, though Loveless soon divorced and remained unmarried. All except Stumph and Loveless expressed satisfaction with married life and children. Charlcia Neuman and Helen Studer were the only women who did not return to some form of outside employment in the years after the war. Of the working mothers, Tina Hill, Juanita Loveless and Mary Stumph did not take time off while their children were small, though each woman made it clear that their poor financial situations made such an option impossible.

None of these women except Juanita Loveless, who willingly chose the life of a single mother and worked as a waitress in a "quasi-bohemian" community, chose nontraditional paths after their wartime experiences in "men's" jobs. However, all of them admitted that they had often thought about alternative careers, especially in their later years. Above all, every woman except for Betty Boggs, who went on to earn a Bachelor degree in biological science and a Master of Fine Arts degree, mentioned a deep felt regret over their lack of education. Only

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[139]Ibid., 253.

Boggs, McSweyn and Neuman completed high school. Again with the exception of Boggs, their separate descriptions of this schooling indicated that their primary courses of study were in the clerical, art and home economics fields. Without exception, these women expressed the belief that a more comprehensive education was the key to women's choices of employment and their chances for advancement. All believed that women should have dreams and ambitions beyond their desires for marriage and children, but not one could imagine how it was possible for women to successfully combine careers and families. Betty Boggs was especially distressed over this familiar "woman's dilemma" during her life. After the birth of her first child during the 1950s, she was able to return to the job she had held as a lab technician. But she reluctantly decided to quit work altogether when she became pregnant with her second child:

> I felt terrible--terrible, because I really enjoyed my job; good, because I could be at home. It was really a mixed emotion. You wanted to be in two places at one time and how can you resolve that? So in one way it was resolved for me, because then I didn't go back to work. I was at home with the kids all the time. . . . I don't regret one moment of ever staying home with them, because to me, it's very important that I was there. I think it has paid off. My daughter has told me, she's glad I didn't work. I think it's important for a woman to do something, 'cause I think she's got a brain, the same as a man. But I can't quite come to grips with women working full time and having children. . . . I feel that there's a lot of problems nowadays that are caused by women working and you've got everybody else raising your kids.[140]

Boggs said she always encouraged her daughter to be independent. At the time of Gluck's interview, her daughter had earned a degree in marketing, and was working for an advertising agency. The contradictory nature of what Boggs wanted for her daughter, and what she and her daughter felt was the right decision for Betty to have made in years gone by, was only one example of the complex problems former

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[140]Ibid., 119-20.

Rosie the Riveters" faced after the war years.

Describing herself as a long-time, ardent feminist, Gluck admitted that Betty Boggs' case frustrated her. Boggs had desperately wanted to take aeronautical engineering classes in college, and had dreamed of becoming a pilot, until a male college counselor informed her that such a course was impossible for women. Though very disappointed, she decided not to fight the system.[141] Of all the women, Gluck felt that Boggs' story should have been much better. She had been well educated, young and single, and the one most likely to have been inspired by her successful, and much enjoyed, experiences within the "man's" world of competition and professional pride. Yet none of this came to be, and Gluck felt that:

> Her pain is still evident as she talked about her dashed hopes of becoming an aeronautical engineer and the dilemma she faced as a young mother with career aspirations. Betty was born too soon. Today, a woman with her aspirations might be an astronaut, although she would probably still face the dilemma about combining a career and motherhood.[142]

Gluck concluded that Boggs was unable to seize control of her destiny because:

> Betty was a dreamer, but not a fighter. Denied the chance to follow through on her dream, she seemed to lose a sense of her own direction. . . . Betty rarely sought out opportunities on her own, although she took full advantage of any that came her way. And she certainly chafed at any suggestion that she was less able because she was a woman.[143]

None of the ten women interviewed by Gluck seemed to have considered the possibility of controlling rather than reacting to their environment. Only Juanita Loveless and Beatrice Clifton displayed nontraditional spirit and energy in their postwar pursuit of fulfilling employment, and Clifton for one did not

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[141]Ibid., 110.

[142]Ibid., 105.

[143]Ibid.

hesitate to credit her war job experience for her new found confidence:

> I was just a mother of four kids, that's all. But I felt proud of myself and felt good being that I had never done anything like that. I felt good that I could do something, and being that it was war, I felt that I was doing my part. It felt good [making] my own money. I could do whatever I wanted with it. . . . I started feeling a little more independent. Just a little, not too much, because I was still not on my own that I could do this and do that. I didn't until after. Then I got really independent.[144]

After guilt over her son's serious illness caused her to quit work:

> I just took over the same as I was before--taking care of my kids. Well, it was kind of quiet and I wasn't too satisfied. That's why I started looking to go to work. I had already tasted that going-out business and I wasn't too satisfied. I stayed home about a year or so, and then I took a little job.[145]

She eventually returned in 1951 to her old riveting job at Lockheed, when the Korean War prompted a new demand for labor in war production. Her strong desire to work led to promotions, but Clifton's lack of education and her concerns for maintaining a happy marital relationship unquestionably limited her potential. By the time Gluck interviewed her she was newly retired and as enthusiastic as ever about the promises of women's future gains in the "men's" world of employment. She did have one particular reservation, however. If she were a woman starting out today:

> I wouldn't want to lose my identity as a woman. I wouldn't want a man to treat me like a man, to say, "You go dig ditches. Because I dig them, you go dig them, too." There are a lot of things that a woman can do--and do good--but lose your identity completely, I just can't see that.[146]

She was not alone in this sentiment. Margarita McSweyn warned that while the women's movement was very good, it was more important to:

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[144]Ibid., 212.

[145]Ibid.

[146]Ibid., 219.

> Be a woman. Push for rights, but be a woman first. Some of them think they have to be more man-ish to get where they want, instead of getting where they want to as a woman. Don't make yourself ugly; make yourself pretty. . . . You can get where you want to get as a woman. Fix your hair and fight like a woman--but get what the women should have.[147]

Juanita Loveless, who remained a waitress until the time Gluck spoke with her, pointed to the impressive accomplishments of such women as Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and said:

> This is the best thing that could ever happen. Women can do these jobs. They have the education now to do them. So for women's lib, yes, it's a good thing, if women do not become too aggressive and too masculine; if they will remember that they are still women and act accordingly and dress accordingly. What I've been seeing in the last year or so in bars, restaurants, even in theaters. . . . are women who are just too aggressive. They have forgotten femininity. They have forgotten that men can open the door for them or that a man can light their cigarettes or that he can greet them without having sex on his mind.[148]

Helen Studer believed that the women's movement had been good for women, and that much more needed to be done to ensure equal pay for equal work:

> But there are certain things that men do and there's things that women do. God put us on earth for a certain thing. A man can't have a baby; . . . So what's going on? What's equal there? For instance, I have lots of work to be done around this place. I know how it should be done, but I don't have the strength to do it, where a man does. If God had wanted us to have been a man, he would have made us a man.[149]

Marye Stumph, who was a divorced mother of two children who worked until retirement age as a secretary in the civil service, made what possibly expressed the predominant ideology of most of the ten women:

> I'm just not the competitive type. I'm not interested in getting out there and see what man's job I can take on. . . . I adapt too easily to whatever happens to me. . . . in my time, I just figured there was men's jobs and

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[147]Ibid., 98.

[148]Ibid., 149.

[149]Ibid. 197.

> women's jobs, and it didn't bother me too much that I wasn't doing a man's job. I was satisfied with the work I was doing.[150]

Looking back over the years, Stumph admitted that if she could live her life over, and knew what she knew then, she would be more aggressive about pursuing an education and her dreams of a career in art. She also said she realized that if women were too passive about pursuing their own ambitions, they would "never achieve anything." She agreed with the idea that someone had to be forceful enough to fight for better conditions for women, but she was not willing to be one of these. "I'm not the militant type myself," she told Gluck in her final interview.[151]

Though Gluck's study was unable to uncover any dramatic changes in the perspectives of the former "Rosies," she did not dismiss the smaller differences. For instance, all of the women had pointed out that their exposure to the "mixed" work force within the war plants was the first time any of them had ever interacted on a professional and personal level with members of other ethnic or religious backgrounds. Margarita Salazar McSweyn commented that before the war various Hispanic social clubs maintained a tight control on the activities of Hispanic girls, and constituted an important bulwark in the perpetuation of a closed, traditional, Hispanic community. But during the war Hispanic girls and young women were exposed to many new non-Hispanic people and ideas, and McSweyn recalled that that was "when the clubs went down the drain." McSweyn said that she had enjoyed the communication with men and members of other ethnic groups so much that she did not hesitate to extend her involvement with them

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[150]Ibid., 68.

[151]Ibid., 53, 68.

beyond the work place. She did not associate the deterioration of community controls with an accompanying deterioration of "decent society," as might be expected from one who had been raised within a strict Christian environment.[152] Betty Boggs concluded that her war job experience "opened up another field of thought, another viewpoint on life in general." It also gave her the opportunity to get out from under her domineering parents' control, which was another breakdown in authority that was not mourned.[153] Charlcia Neuman was a person who had been afraid to take any outside employment, let alone a job in a "rough" factory. Later she told Gluck she was glad she did it. "It was a very good experience for me because of the challenge . . . to prove to myself that I could do it." The interaction with "all the different types of people" also represented a giant step for her. She was particularly proud of the fact that she was broad minded enough to work with Negroes, who were "treated very badly," Mexicans, "who were white as far as we were concerned," and Democrats, who tried very hard "to make me a communist."[154] Tina Hill still carried the bitterness she felt when "Negro" workers were segregated from other workers, but she was also proud of the fighting spirit many African-Americans displayed in their campaigns to have war production jobs opened up to them. She believed that the war did more to get African-Americans out of "the white folks kitchen," than the day when "Lincoln took the bale off of the Negroes." Hill was called back to work by her North American Aircraft employers in 1946, and many other African--Americans were also recalled to work the low-status jobs they held during the war,

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[152]Ibid., 86-88.

[153]Ibid., 112-14, 123.

[154]Ibid., 166-67.

because white people later refused to fill them.[155] It was their foot in the door, and many like Tina Hill took full advantage of it.

After her experience as a defense plant counselor, Susan Laughlin said, she "was terribly impressed with the stamina and intelligence and the common sense of the majority of women. I think women are fantastic."[156] Gluck had a difficult time feeling so buoyed about her interview findings. "Studying the World War II experience of women with a 1960s perspective, we tended to focus on the impermanency of the wartime changes--on the losses, not the gains." However, most of these women truly believed they had profited by their wartime experiences, and after all, Gluck concluded, that was what mattered.[157]

Other testimonies of former war workers were recorded by Studs Terkel in the early 1980s, in his oral history of World War II. Peggy Terry was a nineteen-year-old woman with a child, and a husband abroad in the 101st Airborne, when she lived with her family and worked in two defense plants during the war. Originally from Paducah, Kentucky, she and her husband had traveled around the country as migrant workers during the Depression, and Peggy said that she did not hesitate to take a war job offering far more than they had earned as ditch diggers and farm laborers.[158] "You won't believe how incredibly ignorant I was," she said, "I knew vaguely that a war had started, but I had no idea what it meant." Her first job after the Depression was in a munitions plant in Viola, Kentucky. She

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[155]Ibid., 36, 42.

[156]Ibid., 255.

[157]Ibid., xii, 269-70.

[158]Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1985), 105-108.

and her mother and sister worked there together, and took different shifts in order to share the child care duties at home. "We made the fabulous sum of thirty-two dollars a week. (Laughs.) To us it was just a miracle. Before that, we made nothing." She remembered that there were no women foremen. "We were just a bunch of hillbilly women laughin' and talkin'. It was like a social. Now we'd have money to buy shoes and a dress and pay rent and get some food on the table. We were just happy to have work."[159]

Peggy described the work as being very simple. She pulled levers that filled shells with powder and tamped it down, and "painted red on the tips of tracers." They were also exposed to dangerous chemicals which turned their entire bodies orange, including their eyeballs and hair, and fumes that burned their noses and throats. "It was difficult to breathe. I remember that," and the orange coloring did not disappear until they quit that particular job. They were not able to leave their machines except during regular breaks, and even then water was provided only in the cafeteria and the bathroom, which were both located far from their work area. Peggy said she was forced to drink Coca-Cola and Dr. Pepper when her thirst became unbearable, and these had to be purchased out of a machine. Several years later when she spoke to Terkel, she said "I think of how little we knew of human rights, union rights. We knew Daddy had been a hell-raiser in the mine workers' union, but at that point it hadn't rubbed off on any of us women."[160]

Despite the unpleasant memories, Peggy chose to emphasize only the positive side of her experiences. "My world was really very small," she said,

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[159]Ibid., 105.

[160]Ibid., 106.

when she took her first war job. By the time she moved to Jackson, Michigan to work in another defense plant testing airplane radios, "a whole new world just opened up. . . . I met all those wonderful Polacks. They were the first people I'd ever known that were any different from me." More importantly, "they were all very union-conscious. I learned a lot of things I didn't even know existed."[161] Fifteen years later when she told her story to Terkel, she said she believed that:

> the war was the beginning of my seeing things. You just can't stay uninvolved and not knowing when such a momentous thing is happening. It's just the little things that start happening and you put one piece with another. Suddenly, a puzzle begins to take shape.[162]

Peggy and her family had been desperately poor before the war began, and for them, the gains made during their wartime employment were spectacular:

> The war gave a lot of people jobs. It led them to expect more than they had before. People's expectations, financially, spiritually, were raised. . . . No, I don't think we'd have been satisfied to go back to what we had during the Depression. To be deprived of the things we got used to. Materially, we're a thousand times better off.[163]

Another woman who believed the war was the best thing that could have happened to her was Sarah Killingsworth, an African-American and war bride, who had moved to Los Angeles from Clarksville, Tennessee in 1935. She was working as a live-in maid for the wealthy E. F. Hutton family when they started taking applications at Douglas, an aircraft plant, and she applied:

> I really didn't know what the war was about. . . . This was during the Depression, so I think people were kinda glad the war had started. So right away they started hirin'. All I wanted to do was get in the factory, because

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[161]Ibid., 107.

[162]Ibid., 109.

[163]Ibid., 109-10.

> they were payin' more than what I'd been makin'. Which was forty dollars a week, which was pretty good considering I'd been makin' about twenty dollars a week.[164]

Sarah remembered that she had not wanted a job on the production line because she had "heard so many things about accidents." She "got a job workin' nights in the ladies rest room, which wasn't hard." She said that it was her opinion that most of the women workers, both African-American and white, "weren't interested in the war. Most of them were only interested in the money. Most of us was young and we really didn't know. All we were after was that buck."[165]

However, like Tina Hill, Sarah was convinced that the war was a boon to African-Americans:

> I do know one thing, this place was very segregated when I first come here. Oh, Los Angeles, you just couldn't go and sit down like you do now. You had certain places you went. You had to more less stick to the restaurants and hotels where black people were. It wasn't until the war that it really opened up. 'Cause when I come out here it was awful, just like bein' in the South.[166]

She also believed that the knowledge and self-esteem African-American people gained during their military service and expanded employment opportunities stimulated the push for equal rights. "Everything started openin' up for us. We got a chance to go places we had never been able to go before. In ways it was too bad that so many lives were lost. But I think it was for a worthy cause, because it did make a way for us."[167] As far as wartime improvements were concerned, African-American women like Tina Hill and Sarah Killingsworth were

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[164]Ibid., 111-12.

[165]Ibid., 111.

[166]Ibid., 111-12.

[167]Ibid., 113.

primarily impressed with the benefits gained by their race, not their gender.

Dellie Hahne believed, as Peggy Terry did, that women had achieved some important boosts to their self-esteem during the war, even though her own experiences should have produced the opposite. She was newly graduated from college and working as a substitute teacher when the war began, but she soon married a soldier and spent a large part of the war following him from camp to camp. Her story offered a sobering look at the life of migrant factory workers, whose lifestyle she was uncomfortably forced to experience. "I felt one step above a camp follower," she said:

> You'd go live with your husband, far from home. In the town, provision was made for the service wife. They needed all the womanpower they could get. You'd work in a factory or a restaurant. In some towns, your husband had a regular day off. They would allow you to have that day off. The townspeople were accommodating because they needed us. But you never got the feeling that you were welcome. It was an armed truce.[168]

Various acts of hostility were routinely directed toward anyone regular townspeople considered an "outsider." Hahne remembered that in Amarillo:

> I went to the store to buy a loaf of bread. I am the next. The woman deliberately waits on two or three women who are after me. . . . I opened a checking account and they threw my check out without a word of explanation. Account closed. The landlady returned the check to me furious. . . . The bank manager told me, cut and cold, I had signed my signature card Dellie Hahne and I had signed my check Mrs. Dellie Hahne. In any other person, they'd say, "Look, you made a mistake."[169]

Other indignities included being asked to produce her marriage license, always paying rent in advance, and being told to leave her door open when one of her husband's male friends came to visit. Migrants, whether in the service or in search of war factory work were "looked down upon. . . . it was [an] immediate

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[168]Ibid., 114-16.

[169]Ibid., 116.

cold, contemptuous dismissal."[170] Nonetheless, Hahne was convinced that some good was gained:

> There was *one* good thing came out of it. I had friends whose mothers went to work in factories. For the first time in their lives, they worked outside the home. They realized that they were capable of doing something more than cook a meal. I remember going to Sunday dinner one of the older women invited me to. She and her sister at the dinner table were talking about the best way to keep their drill sharp in the factory. I had never heard anything like this in my life. It was marvelous. I was tickled.[171]

After the war began to wind down, she said, women were "sold a bill of goods:"

> They were hammering away that the woman who went to work did it temporarily to help her man, and when he came back, he took her job and she cheerfully leaped back to the home. There was a letter column in which some woman wrote to her husband overseas: "This is an exact picture of our dashboard. Do we need a quart of oil?" Showing how dependent we were upon our men. Those of us who read it said, This is pure and simple bullshit. . . . But they still wanted women to be dependent, helpless.[172]

Hahne did not believe that women were so gullible: "Cause they had a taste of freedom, they had a taste of making their own money, making their own decisions. I think the beginning of the women's movement had its seeds right there in World War Two."[173]

It is tempting to believe this, considering the upbeat opinions of the former "Rosies" themselves, but was there enough evidence to support such a conclusion?

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[170]Ibid.

[171]Ibid., 119.

[172]Ibid.

[173]Ibid.

CHAPTER V

RECONVERSION

Despite the tacit understanding that women would be leaving their positions in heavy industry after the war, did women eventually develop enough of an interest and pride in their new occupations to regret their initial acceptance of a temporary status? When he wrote an article for the *Atlantic Monthly* in June of 1945, A. G. Mezerik apparently believed they did. But he also felt that women had not done enough to protect themselves from the inevitable attempts of men to hold them to the original supposition:

> From the beginning, the majority of women workers failed to take considerations of their postwar future seriously. Now that the end is in sight, many want to keep their jobs but have done little to consolidate their positions--magazines have published early wartime interviews and polls in which women talked of "going home,". . . . But the damage has been done: the public has absorbed the idea that women will move out voluntarily.[1]

Women hurt themselves, he claimed, when they did not participate in unions in large enough numbers and with enough spirit. The result was that men were jeopardizing the jobs of those women who would *need* to work after the war. Eleven million vets, he pointed out, also needed jobs, and reconversion meant layoffs and seniority rules dictating who remained or was rehired after reconversion. "The National Women's Trade Union League reports that industrial women have little if any real seniority protection, and it indicts both employers' policies and union contracts," where specifications had been made for "duration"

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[1]A. G. Mezerik, "Getting Rid of the Women" *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1945, 79.

status of women workers and postwar priority for male workers.[2] Women were always laid off in cutbacks and never rehired, and their pay was cut, but large company chairmen were not concerned, Mezerik continued. The same thing had happened after World War I, when women workers were forced out of factories and other male jobs into the already crowded service sector. Once clumped into this segment of the job market, women faced heavy competition, which drove wages even lower, and this invariably meant, Mezerik added, that men's wages were eventually dragged down as a consequence. Of course, he added, the government and big business were making a big show of assuring returning veterans and worried Americans that the goal of full employment would be met:

> But the speaker, nine times out of ten, means full employment for males. . . . Up to now there is no evidence that the many committees which get out the full-employment pamphlets, and whose representatives make the speeches, recognize this situation, and there is equally little evidence that any but a handful of women are making a fight to combat it. . . . Men are ganging up on women in industry, and it is up to the women to go into action to stop that old-fashioned attitude from denying them jobs and opportunity.[3]

Mezerik ended his article with this harsh criticism of women, in spite of earlier statements which explained why women would have an extremely difficult time accomplishing what he urged. He pinpointed traditional beliefs in the priority of the male sex to certain jobs, growing misconceptions about women's permanence in industry, and a renewed tendency to blame everything on an ancient "battle of the sexes," as being more than a little daunting to women's aspirations for equality of opportunity:

> Women are facing real antagonism from men who make it hard for women to gain confidence and the desire to stay on the job--only women who *need*

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[2]Ibid., 80.

[3]Ibid., 80-83.

the job to survive and support others, swallows her fears and pride, and stays.[4]

Despite Mezerik's assertions that all that was needed was for women to summon their courage and protest through organized efforts, modern studies show that those women who resisted discriminatory employment policies were quickly defeated. Lyn Goldfarb and Nancy Gabin have researched the recorded evidence of women workers' postwar protests, and have both concluded that they had little chance of success. While a March 1944 U.A.W.-C.I.O. survey disclosed that almost 50 percent of those who had never been employed in a factory before wished to continue shop work after the war, their enthusiasm for their new professions was not enough.[5] Only the strongest efforts of well organized and experienced women union members, backed up by an equally forceful national woman's movement, would have had any chance of defeating men's efforts to push them out of heavy industry. Sophisticated, publicity-conscious union leaders seldom hesitated to present a cooperative and compliant front whenever the U.A.W. Women's Bureau, or the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau confronted them with demands for fair treatment for women workers. U.A.W. President, R. J. Thomas, acknowledged that there were indeed inequities resulting from the misuse of the seniority system. In November of 1944, he sent letters to all U.A.W. officers and regional directors advising them to review local contracts for seniority provisions and other clauses which discriminated against women workers. Goldfarb was unable to find evidence that this letter produced the requested action. On September 26, 1945, Thomas sent a more strongly worded directive to local union

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[4]Ibid., 80.

[5]"Women's Postwar Plans," *Monthly Labor Review* 58 (May 1944): 103.

presidents and international representatives, condemning the U.A.W. locals for their failure to protect the rights of women workers. He was aware, he warned, that layoffs were continuing and management appeared to be forcing women out of the plants. "In one case," he cited as an example, "an entire department stopped working in protest when a woman was placed in the department on a job in line with her seniority and which she could perform."[6] The International Executive Board (I.E.B.) of the U.A.W. made an effort to appear concerned about the rights and welfare of their female constituency. However, the I.E.B. was empowered only to make recommendations, not to enforce them. Without the fear of penalty, Goldfarb asserted, locals' officers and male union members were free to actively, openly, and at times in collaboration with management, discriminate against women workers.[7] During a U.A.W. Women's Bureau conference in 1944, 150 delegates representing 300,000 female U.A.W. members, charged that:

> management is engaging in a vicious and deliberate campaign to induce women to quit by transferring them from one department to another, by assigning women the least desirable jobs, and by unceasing psychological drive to harass women out of the plants.[8]

Nancy Gabin investigated several cases of women union members who dared to contest these conditions through union channels, and found that in every instance the women met with intimidating opposition. The union did not support their efforts in any way, and the women were subjected to psychological attacks from male union members and management that grew more hostile the longer they

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[6]Lyn Goldfarb, *Separate and Unequal: Discrimination Against Women Workers After World War II (The U.A.W. 1944-1954)* (Silversprings, Maryland: The Women's Work Project, 1978), 26-27.

[7]Ibid., 27-30.

[8]Ibid., 27.

persisted. Overall, Gabin's research of individual cases disclosed that very few women were willing to expose themselves to such an ordeal, though she felt that those who did exhibited a strength and courage which should be recognized for the daring feats they were. Gabin seemed convinced that had these women had a strong, well organized women's movement to support them, both inside and outside the heavy industry plants, their defiant efforts would have met with far better results.[9]

If the opposition to working women was distressing within the durable goods production plants themselves, the hostility rumbling from without was no less intimidating. It was true, as Mezerik pointed out, that President Franklin Roosevelt assured Americans about his dedication to providing full employment for all in his January 6, 1945 State of the Nation Message. With the reintroduction of war veterans to the labor market, Roosevelt estimated, 60,000,000 jobs would be needed, but he was confident that such a goal would be accomplished. On January 18, Senator James E. Murray of Montana submitted a bill to provide full employment under a national policy and program.[10] These equalitarian sounding promises were nonetheless weighted against women workers. For while the bill declared that "All Americans able to work and seeking work have the right to useful, remunerative, regular, and full-time employment," it also stipulated that the "all" did not include those with "full-time housekeeping responsibilities"

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[9]Nancy Gabin, "'They Have Placed a Penalty on Womanhood': Women Auto Workers in Detroit-Area U.A.W. Locals, 1945-1947" *Feminist Studies* 8 (Summer 1982): 373-98.

[10]"Major Text of Roosevelt's State of the Nation Address," *New York Times*, 23 January 1945. p. 20 (L).

among the citizens who were entitled to this right.[11] In another indication of official opposition to the idea of full-time employment when it included women, Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio cautioned a National Industrial Conference Board that any attempt to create 60,000,000 jobs should not include obligations to women who wanted to work when they had husbands who were able and willing to support them. Senator Taft went on to declare:

> that any direct guarantee of full-time jobs at good wages would involve the Government in the placement of every man and woman in the country and ultimately the assignment by the Government of every man and woman to the job selected by the Government. . . . this was the system in Russia today, but was the very opposite of the whole American tradition.[12]

Phillip Murry, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.), who was also in attendance "conceded that he too was opposed to the outright guarantee by Government of employment and purchasing power, 'because I realize the dangerous bypaths down which this would lead America.'"[13] This reference to the sinister implications of an overbearing government was not new. President Roosevelt and his advisors had dealt with the constant suspicions of conservatives when they sought to establish the social welfare programs of the New Deal. People such as Congressman Martin Dies of Texas felt such liberal policies were leading the nation to Communism. He proclaimed that New Deal supporters were nothing more than "Red Dupes," and in 1938 chaired the House Committee on Un-American Activities.[14] By the time World War II forced the alliance of the United

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[11]Kathleen McLaughlin, *New York Times*, 19 January 1945, p. 20 (L).

[12]*New York Times*, 19 January 1945, p. 14 (L).

[13]Ibid.

[14]George Brown Tindall, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1984), 1094.

States and Russia against the Axis powers, the original Un-American Committee had dwindled in spirit and membership, but that suddenly changed on January 6, of 1945 when the *New York Times* reported that:

> The utterly unexpected re-emergence of the Dies Committee, now transmuted from a special investigating body into one of the standing committees of the House of Representatives, has evoked great curiosity as to its future. A week ago everyone thought it was dead. Liberal elements, including the C.I.O. wing of organized labor, were gleeful over its apparent demise. The Administration hoped the November elections had disbanded any Democratic and Republican coalition favoring continuance of the committee. Even its own members considered it dead. Yet with astonishing suddenness, 70 Democrats and 137 Republicans followed the lead of Representative John Rankin, Democrat, of Mississippi, in demanding authority for continuing the committee. . . . Without . . . Martin Dies at its head, the committee may lose considerable of its vigor and drive. . . . But there are other men in the House who see as many Communists back of the door as Mr. Dies ever did.[15]

The postwar rush to extreme conservatism may have discouraged newly awakened female ambitions. Although numerous opinion polls showed that around 75 percent of all women working in war industries wanted to remain in their wartime jobs, it was possible that the majority of women workers felt fatalistic about their chances of doing so. By January 1945, James F. Byrnes, Director of War Mobilization and Reconversion, was complaining that the still urgent need for war production workers was being harmed by workers who left in droves every time the media announced the nearness of victory.[16] This was due, Byrnes explained, to the fact that men were still being drafted into the service, housewives were returning home, and "others" were anxious to ensure alternate jobs during the period of reconversion layoffs.[17] It apparently never occurred

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[15]"Rebirth of Dies Committee Starts Puzzled Speculation," *New York Times*, 7 January 1945, p. 10 (E).

[16]*New York Times*, 6 January 1945, p. 7 (L).

[17]*New York Times*, 2 January 1945, p. 12 (L).

to Byrnes to include the exiting women workers among the "others" who were anxious about acquiring alternate employment. His unhesitating assumption mirrored what could be found throughout postwar America. Many like Mary Anderson from the Women's Bureau; Elizabeth Hawes from the U.A.W.-C.I.O. International Education Department; Colston E. Warner, President of the Consumers Union of the U.S.; and Gladys L. Palmer from the Industrial Research Association of the University of Pennsylvania, wrote well documented magazine and journal articles in defense of women's need for, and right to employment.[18] But their vigorous presentations of fact and reason did little to stem a renewal of the historical criticism of working women that began during the war and escalated for several years afterward.

By February of 1945, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins was urging the speedy reinstatement and strengthening of protective laws which restricted women and children to limited working hours and "special" working conditions. Those women who took jobs only because of the war, Perkins firmly declared, should be encouraged to leave the labor market. She said she realized that only three or four million women workers fell into this group, while some 15,000,000 would have to continue to work out of economic necessity. But, she continued, these women could be expected to shun "most of the hard, heavy work for which they are not suited," and for which they have been accepted only because of the shortage of

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[18]Mary Anderson, "16,000,000 Women at Work: What Will Happen to Them After the War?," *New York Times Magazine*, 18 July 1943, 18-19, 29; Elizabeth Hawes, "Do Women Workers Get an Even Break?," *New York Times Magazine*, 19 November 1944, 13, 41-42; Colston E. Warne, "The Reconversion of Women," *Current History* 8 (March 1945): 201-206; Gladys L. Palmer, "Women in the Post-War Labor Market," *Forum* 104, no. 2, October 1945, 130-34.

male workers.[19] Frieda S. Miller, who replaced Mary Anderson as Director of the Women's Bureau in 1944, suggested ways in which the equal pay measures passed during the war could be retained. In an address to a meeting of the Boston Women's Trade Union League, and in a report entitled "Employment Opportunities in Characteristic Industrial Occupations of Women," she reasoned that most of the strongest equal pay contract clauses had been achieved within the traditional "women-employing industries," and were least likely to be rescinded. Therefore, Miller continued, as long as women workers remained in these traditional "women-employing industries," life would be much easier for them.[20] Meanwhile, Representatives Mary Norton, Claude Pepper, and Wayne Morse introduced the Women's Equal Pay Act in Congress which sought to ensure equal pay and opportunity to women. Even with the aggressive support of the Women's Bureau and the Women's Trade Union League, however, the stronger opposition from chambers of commerce and management associations prolonged the passage of a revised version until 1963.[21] When it came to the federally funded child care provisions, a letter from Edith Sokol to her husband Victor, who was serving overseas, explained one American's version of what happened. Sokol was working as the director of the True Sisters Day Care Center in Cleveland, Ohio when the morning newspaper of August 21, 1945:

> came out with the announcement that Lanham Funds have ceased and all the day care centers all over the country will be closed by October 30, 1945.

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[19]"Labor Safeguards After War Sought," *New York Times*, 13 February 1945, p. 26 (L).

[20]*New York Times*, 14 January 1945, p. 29 (L); *New York Times*, 15 January 1945, p. 12 (L).

[21]Kessler-Harris, 297-98, 314.

> Everyone knew that Lanham Funds cease 30 days after the emergency but they were hoping for an amendment to the bill or something. Anyhow, Senator Lanham is only out for the business interests and therefore doesn't care what happens to all these mothers and children. All that he originated the bill for was to get women in industry--after the war--the hell with them![22]

The Lanham Act funding of child care centers was extended for another six months, but in March of 1946 all federal support ended.[23]

Edith Sokol continued to serve as director of the True Sister's Day Care Center during the extension period, and during that time she expressed some strong opinions to her returning veteran husband. On October 21, 1945 she related that she and a friend had been:

> talking about some of the adjustments we'll have to make to our husbands' return. I must admit I'm not exactly the same girl you left--I'm twice as independent as I used to be and to top it off, I sometimes think I've become "hard as nails" . . . more and more I've been living exactly as *I* want to and . . . I do as I damn please. As a whole, I don't think my changes will effect [sic] our relationship, but I do think you'll have to remember that there are some slight alterations in me. I'm pretty sure that holds true for you too--am I correct?[24]

On November 9, 1945 the confident and spirited Sokol had this to say:

> I want to make sure I make myself clear about how I've changed. I want you to know *now* that you are not married to a girl that's interested solely in a home--I shall definitely have to work all my life--I get emotional satisfaction out of working; and I don't doubt that many a night you will cook supper while I'm at a meeting. Also, dearest--I shall never wash and iron--there are laundries for that! Do you think you'll be able to bear living with me?[25]

He did, but apparently not without the sacrifice of Edith's wartime convictions.

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[22]Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 156.

[23]Ibid., 157.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

Edith Sokol and her husband Victor were reunited in February 1946, and established their home in San Antonio, Texas. He went on to earn a law degree in 1949 and established a law practice, but Edith stayed home to raise three daughters. She eventually received the M.Ed. degree in 1964, and taught social studies at the elementary level for twenty years. However, she and her husband divorced after forty-four years of marriage.[26]

What type and strength of postwar pressures would it have taken to undermine the enthusiasm of other independent-minded women like Edith Sokol? Several surveys found that four out of five female war workers liked their jobs, including 70 percent of those with children and 84 percent without children.[27] Yet in 1951 when the Census Bureau asked a sample of the 4,244,000 women who worked during the war but not afterwards why they remained unemployed, half cited family responsibilities, and one-fifth, or an estimated 1,161,000 replied that their husband's objection was a decisive factor. None of the other reasons, such as age, illness and disability, or the return to school or a move to other locations, came close to having as much of an effect on their decisions to remain at home.[28] There were additional forces which may have influenced their life choices.

Even as the wartime manpower campaigns were being vigorously waged to lure women into the labor force, concerned Americans fretted over the possible postwar consequences of the change in attitude and behavior such a mobilization

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[26]Ibid., 159.

[27]D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 86.

[28]Ibid.

required. While the worrying was initially triggered by anxieties about working women in particular, the resulting profusion of conflicting social commentaries offered an illuminating sampling of Americans' thoughts on women in general.

As women poured into the labor market at the urgent behest of their government, numerous agencies were already asking them how soon they planned to leave when the war was over. Between 1943 and 1945 numerous agencies surveyed thousands of working women about their postwar plans. They found, and reported to interested government officials, business leaders, and concerned citizens, that on average 61 to 85 percent of all employed women, and 47 to 68 percent of employed married women, wanted to keep their jobs.[29] This worried many people, even when census figures showed that 65 percent of all women (fourteen years of age and older), and 75 percent of all married women (fourteen years of age and older), did not enter the labor force during the war, or did not remain for long when they did enter.[30] But these facts were not publicized. Only the unprecedented increase in women's nontraditional occupations received the sensationalized headlines. The fact that so much interest was directed toward employed females during the war suggested that traditionalists were detecting an alarming amount of satisfaction coming from working women.

In December of 1943, *Good Housekeeping* published the results of their magazine survey of working women which included a surprisingly supportive argument in favor of women's postwar employment. In the introduction, the author Cecil Brown assured the reader that she had personally spoken with women employed in shipyards, aircraft factories, armament plants, business offices, and stores,

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[29]Hartmann, 90.

[30]Campbell, 247.

"from coast to coast." The results of her observations were illuminating. For instance, a woman who worked in an Oregon shipyard told Brown that, of course she intended to do the patriotic thing after the war by giving up her job to a returning soldier:

> "But," she grimaced, "I'd hate to do it. I love the noise and the welding and all the people in the yard. I love people, and I like the thrill of being with them, working with them, laughing with them, being one of them." I found scores of women in war jobs all over the country who felt as this shipyard welder did. They have found a new kind of life, an excitement, a "thrill," and a sense of creative achievement . . . You don't easily forget or forsake a sense of achievement.[31]

Another woman working in a Wisconsin war plant told Brown, "I'm working until the war is over. Then I guess I'll get married and raise some children." When Brown asked her if she was willing to give up a paycheck to marry a man who would probably make less, she replied: "Sure, if I want a home and children, I guess that's what I'll have to do. . . . I like the money and the financial freedom, but, well I'd like to have children. . . . I guess you might say that sex will solve my problem."[32] Brown said that this "girl expressed the feeling of many Americans I talked with: Sex will solve the womanpower problem." But others she talked with believed in taking a more active role to assure women's postwar retreat to the home. A woman supervisor of education in Iowa City told the author that the "magnetism of factories" for women could not be dismissed easily. "She suggested a postwar education program. 'A campaign,' she said, 'to glorify the American homemaker. We will have to make the home inviting to women and sell them the idea of the home, just as we sold them the idea of going

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[31]Cecil Brown, "What's Going to Happen to Our Women Workers?" *Good Housekeeping* 117, December 1943, 78, 80.

[32]Ibid.

to war.'"[33] Many others Brown spoke with expressed the belief that women had to leave the durable goods industries as soon as possible after the war. "In scores of cities, towns, and villages where I talked with American men and women, I found the majority know that womanpower is a problem." As a result:

> Women workers feel men are still hostile and resentful and eager for them to leave after war--causing feelings of insecurity. In some instances, there is a mass exodus of women workers from war plants every time news of our victories is splashed in bold headlines, because women have been given the impression that they are to go home as soon the war is over.[34]

Brown made it clear that in her opinion the situation working women faced was neither fair nor wise. Must a woman be forced by her society to marry and have children, when she really wanted to work and enjoy financial freedom? Would America simply toss on the ash heap the great skills of women, and more important to the individual, deny them the right of opportunity to work? Brown was optimistic that women could prevail against reactionary beliefs. After all, she asserted as though it were an accepted fact, "this war has changed the mental status quo of many women," and women could make it happen even if they had to combine their working and homemaking careers.[35] This was a revolutionary, and probably disturbing article for defenders of the traditional faith to discover in a very popular and widely distributed "woman's" magazine. It was not typical of the articles found in the genre. Most common were the magazine features which sought to soothe readers with assurances that despite the psychic disturbances of war, everything in America was comfortably safe from distressing change.

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[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 80, 82-83.

[35]Ibid., 42, 83.

In June of 1944, journalist Nell Giles was again reporting on the "duration" attitudes and behavior of the "new women in industry," for the *Ladies Home Journal.* In the introduction to a "coast to coast survey of working women," Giles assured *LHJ* readers that of all the women who had trooped into war plants since Pearl Harbor, by far the majority wanted, "in the main, to go home."[36] As proof of this conclusion Giles reported the findings of the *LHJ* survey, which were very different from any of the data collected by such agencies as the Department of Labor Women's Bureau, labor union polls, the national public opinion polls, or *Fortune* magazine. When asked, "Do you plan to stop working after the war?" only 44 percent of the women answering the *LHJ* poll said "yes," while 47 percent said "no." They were then asked whether they "looked forward to a time when you can give up your job and stay home and take care of home and children, or would you prefer to turn your children over to a day nursery?," and 75 percent said that they "looked forward to going home." An overwhelming 91 percent said that a woman should quit working if she "saw that having a job was making her marriage less happy." These and other carefully skewed questions supplied what was for Giles, and the editors of the *LHJ* the only "obvious" conclusion: "The *Journal* survey clearly indicates that women want marriage and homemaking, not factory jobs; that they work in industry only because they have to or for an emergency."[37]

There were many such attempts to project the impression that women were very anxious to leave their "unnatural" roles as wage earners and return to the

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[36]Nell Giles, "What About the Women?: Do They Want to Keep Their Factory Jobs When the War is Over?," *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1944, 23.

[37]Ibid., 161.

warmth, security, and duties of the home. But in many ways these efforts were exaggerated, and some women found them downright silly. Agnes Rogers, an associate editor of *Reader's Digest,* was one who commented on the media's determined efforts to ignore the realities of life in favor of an obviously concocted ideal. Despite the evidence found in the census data on working women, she began, the occupation most frequently portrayed in the media was that of housewife. "It is here that the American woman is at her most radiant, most healthy, most energetic."[38] Rogers humorously described the many chores the happy housewife performed, adding that the idealized woman:

> does all this with her hair arranged as for a party, dressed in the freshest of housedresses, over which she wears a wholly unnecessary apron without so much as one spot on it; she frisks about tirelessly on very high heels. Her reward is the fond admiration of her devoted husband, the envy of her neighbors, the boasting of her children, who lisp their praises of Mom's cooking and other accomplishments. . . .[39]

And why was there so much emphasis on the "little housewife," Rogers continued? It was because she represented a market for the largest number of products: food, soap, housewares, appliances, furniture, cosmetics, adult and children's clothes, children's products, first aid, and linens.[40] Was Agnes Rogers the only one to recognize the "happy housewife" media image as an advertising gimmick?

Women's magazines portrayed women as one-dimensional caricatures, which women may have dismissed as amusing or inconsequential, but other commentaries on women and their life roles were far from humorous. Certain social

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[38]Agnes Rogers, "Is it Anyone We Know?," in *Women Today: Their Conflicts, Their Frustrations, and Their Fulfillments,* ed. Elizabeth Bragdon (New York: The Bobbs-Marrill Company, Inc., 1953), 245-48.

[39]Ibid., 248.

[40]Ibid., 249.

observers believed that working women's experiences in war plants had changed them into individualistic rebels, and many, like the Iowa City supervisor of education, urgently expressed their ideas about how best to motivate women into leaving their war jobs and returning to their "feminine" pursuits. One such person was Willard Waller, associate professor of sociology at Barnard College. In 1944, in his book entitled *The Veteran Comes Back* he warned all Americans, but particularly women, that the code of ethics, attitudes, relationships and skills that their men had been forced to acquire to become good soldiers, were antithetical to those of an ordinary man existing as a peaceful, productive civilian. The returning veteran, Waller cautioned, "will be unfit to live in civil society and will use his power to transform the society for his own benefit." Women, he demanded, should show understanding and compassion for these men, or the men would not readjust to peaceful society.[41] By the end of 1944, *The Veteran Comes Back* had gone through three printings and Waller's message had been broadcast on radio and in such respected media publications as *Colliers, The New York Times,* and *Science Digest.*[42] By February 18, 1945, in an article published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* supplement, *This Week Magazine,* he went further by predicting that women who failed to heed his advice would be guilty of instigating a renewed "battle of the sexes."[43]

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[41]William J. Goode, Frank F. Furstenbert, Jr., and Larry R. Mitchell, *Willard W. Waller: On the Family, Education and War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 101-102.

[42]Ibid., 101.

[43]Willard Waller, "The Coming War on Women," *This Week Magazine,* 18 February 1945, 4.

> Especially in the period following a major war are men and women at loggerheads. War brings about a temporary revolution in the relations of the sexes. One might say the women get out of hand. This happened in World War I, and before that, in our Civil and Revolutionary Wars. But after this war the women will probably put up a stronger fight for supremacy because this war's changes have merely climaxed generations of feministic progress. . . . may God help the men, the women and the United States of America if the men lose.[44]

Waller then touched upon his primary concern:

> At least for the next generation, the patriarchal family must be restored and strengthened. Women must bear and rear children, husbands must support them. Our nation must have more babies or become a second-rate power. . . . If we are to have an adequate birth rate, we must hear less talk about women's rights and more talk about their duty to the race. The plain fact is, women do not produce children under the conditions of freedom and equality that have existed in the United States since the last war. . . .[45]

However, it was not the birth rate decrease among the "inferior" types of American women that he was concerned about:

> Usually the career of a brilliant woman is bought at the cost of an empty nursery. The price is too high, even if the contribution is great. . . . If the reproduction of people with superior capacities skips but a single generation, the race can never be the same again. We cannot afford sex equality if it entails biological degeneration. Therefore, we must exert pressure, offer every inducement to favor reproduction, especially of the fit.[46]

In this article, Waller was marshalling as many as possible of the traditional arguments against women's right to equality and independence. Were postwar women influenced by such mental bullying? Answering this question has been difficult for historians, but that may be due to factors which provide barriers to investigative efforts. For instance, at the conclusion of Waller's article in *This Week Magazine,* the editors asked their readers what they thought of the

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid., 4, 5.

[46]Ibid.

article. They announced later that they had received so many replies they were considering dedicating a future article to them.[47] However, they never did so. Were women's responses less supportive of traditional ideals than the editors were willing to disclose? When reporters asked Eleanor Roosevelt about Waller's warning of a pending "battle of the sexes," she dismissed it by saying that there was "not much reality to it."

> It is historically true that nations which do not keep up their birth rate have been nations on the decline. . . . But it doesn't help a country to have families with twelve children and no food; it helps to have whatever number of children they can feed and educate decently and give every child a chance for good development.[48]

Others were not happy about returning veterans being portrayed as uncivilized killing machines, in need of "special" treatment for overcoming their social deficiencies. As a veteran himself, the Pulitzer Prize winning war cartoonist Bill Mauldin was especially angered by what he viewed as the exploitative quality of the literature on the "rehabilitation" of the veteran. "Dozens of hungry authors had seen the coming demand for this sort of trash, and many had paid off the mortgage on the old homestead by posing as authorities and writing quick-selling books on the subject."[49] In her examination of the literature on women's "obligations" to World War II veterans, Susan Hartmann found that additional calls to reason by several military and civilian sources were far outnumbered by the more sensational "advice" commentaries. "Most of the advice literature," Hartmann concluded, "disclosed a fear that

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[47]Ibid.; *This Week Magazine*, 15 April 1945, 22.

[48]"First Lady Scouts 'War of Sexes' Idea," *New York Times*, 20 February 1945, p. 22 (L).

[49]Bill Mauldin, *Back Home* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1947), 40-41.

women had changed, had matured and grown in ways that posed a threat to family stability. Thus the writers asked women to conceal or reverse those changes."[50] As a whole, she pointed out, none of this literature portrayed either men or women fairly, but that did not not deter those who supported a "larger trend in popular psychology and sociology of the period which saw women as both the cause, and potential redeemers, of a deteriorating society."[51] From this premise it was a short jump to the conclusion that mothers, whom most psychologists and lay persons accepted as having the greatest influence on the formation of young minds, should be diverted by any means from all but maternal pursuits. Feminist ideologies which promoted equality and independence for women had long been criticized for their supposedly subversive potential. The hostility of the wartime criticism took on an even harsher tone.

Probably the most famous, and infamous, of the "anti-feminist" harangues was Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers,* which came out in 1942. In this scathing social commentary reminiscent of H. L. Mencken, Wylie denounced America as "a matriarchy in fact if not in declaration." He excoriated statesmen, businessmen, professors, doctors, scientists, the Common Man, the church and Jesus Christ for the deplorable state of society, but it was his inclusion of "Mom" as their partner in crime that incited a public furor. In one chapter, entitled "The Common Woman," Wylie criticized women for exploiting the ancient reverence for motherhood long after they had lost their right to it. Technology had made their "job" too easy, and they had diverted this energy in other, socially destructive,

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[50]Susan Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning W. W. II Veterans," *Women's Studies* 5 (1978): 234.

[51]Ibid., 235-36.

directions. Though Wylie went on to indict American "Moms" for a number of personal and social failings, what he was primarily concerned about was the effect that "Momism" was having on the nation's children in general, and male children in particular. He was convinced that this "new, huge class of idle, middle-aged women," were living vicariously through their children. "Moms" everywhere were smothering and babying their children, Wylie maintained, in order to ensure that they never attained enough maturity to leave their mothers to inevitable loneliness. This was producing a national disaster, because too many American children were not developing into the type of disciplined and courageous adults that their country needed to maintain its strength and vitality.[52] Others agreed, and a growing chorus of "expert" opinion began to offer the "scientific proof" that Wylie's commentary lacked.

In 1946, Dr. Edward Strecker, a psychiatric consultant to the secretary of war, raised similar concerns. Though he considered his argument to be a far less "vindictive" picture of "Mom," Strecker nonetheless blamed American mothers for the shockingly high number of men who were rejected by the military during World War II.[53] He was outraged by the fact that 1,825,000 men were rejected outright for neuropsychiatric causes, and that an additional 600,000 were later discharged for the same reasons. Strecker was convinced that their "illness" represented "a serious inner emotional conflict that was common to all--self-preservation versus soldierly ideals."

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[52]Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1954), 51, 194-217.

[53]Edward A. Strecker, *Their Mothers' Sons: The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem* (New York: J. B. Lippincott company, 1946), 13, 18.

> Why did the desire for self-preservation defeat one group of men, to their discredit, and not the other? The answer in ninety percent of the cases can be given in one word, IMMATURITY. . . . [and] in the vast majority of case histories, a "mom" is at fault.[54]

Strecker added that "mom is not of her own making." She was the product of a social system which sanctified "Momism" in the first place, and was "veering toward a matriarchy. . . ."[55] Strecker then made the assertion that the only cure for "Momism" depended on the limitation of women's influence over children's formative years. Fathers, he demanded, had to stop being selfish and spend more time in child rearing, particularly of sons. They should also spend more time with their lonely wives, he advised, both inside and outside of the home.[56] Strecker implied that American women were not happy with the status quo, but he was more interested in the mental state of the nation's future soldiers and citizens. His examination went no further to analyze the reasons for women's discontent.

Other psychiatric specialists made this "problem" the primary focus of their studies. In 1947, Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg declared in *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* that "contemporary women in very large numbers are psychologically disordered and that their disorder is having terrible social and personal effects involving men in all departments of their lives as well as women."[57] Lundberg and Farnham believed that "women as a whole. . . . are maladjusted, much more so than men." Why? The authors breezily dismissed

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[54]Ibid., 18-23.

[55]Ibid., 30, 73.

[56]Ibid., 172.

[57]Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947), v.

complex contributing factors such as economic boom and depression, modern large-scale war, social change, urbanization, and mechanization. For them, these were merely "descriptive generalities" which brought "very little useful enlightenment to the common man." Instead, the authors said they preferred to offer a more "precise knowledge" which informed the "simple" common man on what he could do about the "problem."[58] "The basis for most of this unhappiness," they declared, was laid in the childhood home and the principal instruments of its creation were women.[59] Industrialism had led to the reduction of women's traditionally honored role and the subsequent destruction of the traditional home, and women by the millions were faced with a dilemma. Should they stay at home with nothing of importance to do, or should they go to work? This loss of the ancient purpose and prestige, Farnham and Lundberg concluded, was "the root cause of modern women's restlessness and discontent . . . panic set in . . . and they became neurotics on a wholesale scale . . . a deep primordial rhythm had been broken."[60] Rather than seeking new ways to reinvigorate the traditional home and feminine role within it, women were following many other ultimately ruinous paths. Some were being seduced by the man-hating siren song of the "masculinized" woman's movement, and others were channeling an obsessive amount of energy into the rearing of their children.[61] All of this, the authors assured the common man, was causing the deterioration of American society. However, they did have a plan for redemption and rehabilitation.

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[58]Ibid., 22, 25.

[59]Ibid., 71.

[60]Ibid., 90, 105, 117, 124.

[61]Ibid., 33, 304, 368-69.

Women had to realize they were dependent on men. There must be no fantasy in their minds about being "independent women." They should accept motherhood as the most natural thing possible, and never question the advisability of pregnancy under any personal, financial or other conditions. At the same time, however, the country should discourage "certain types" of people from propagating. Women who "might nevertheless be inclined to enter fields belonging to the male area of exploit or authority--law, mathematics, physics, business, industry and technology--should certainly be allowed to do so," but "government and socially-minded organizations should . . . through propaganda, make it clear that such pursuits are not generally desirable for women."[62]

Another psychiatrist who was concerned about the effects of the modern alteration of women's traditional roles was Helen Deutsch. In her 1944 study on *The Psychology of Women* she commented that:

> As a direct witness of European developments after the first world war, I saw the manner in which sex differences expressed themselves at that time. . . . The masculinization of women was unmistakably expressed in their invasion of the masculine professions, the changes in their appearance, dress, coiffure, etc., and their energetic attempts to give their body structure a more masculine character. . . . Sports activities, greater intellectualization, the one-child system so widespread in the European middle-class, were the visible forms in which the turning away from femininity manifested itself.[63]

This, continued Deutsch, inevitably brought about a "masculinity complex" in women, which was "characterized by the predominance of active and aggressive tendencies that lead to conflicts with the women's environment and above all with the remaining feminine world." Women simply could not participate in "male" pursuits or occupations since such activities "obviously" conflicted with women's

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[62]Ibid., 319, 370-71.

[63]Helen Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 393.

"true" nature. On the other hand, she assured the American reader, "we must not let ourselves be blinded by the successful, useful and 'normal,' that is, intensified war activity of women." Women were merely reacting to the external influences of their nation's need for them, and not from any internal desires to work. Instead, her observations of what had occurred after the first world war led her to believe that:

> The strata of women that actively participated in the war effort were not carried away by this trend. The proletarian and petty bourgeois women, those who had really replaced men at hard work in factories, on railroads, etc., turned their jobs back to the men with a feeling of relief, and "hurried home." It also appears that in these very strata, despite the increasing misery and unemployment, the birthrate went up after the war. . . . The masculinity complex will become less odious, because neurotic conflict will be replaced by a better sublimation less obstructed from without. . . . The majority of women whom war has made more active than ever, will return as quickly and energetically as possible to the basically conservative.[64]

If these socially conscious psychological experts were so certain about the fundamentally submissive and maternal nature of women, why did they go to such great lengths to warn readers about nontraditional women? Books and articles written by Wylie, Waller, Strecker, Farnham and Lundberg, and Deutsch received an amazing amount of exposure both during and after the war. Yet, during the same time that professional journals, newspapers and popular women's magazines were carrying these and many other commentaries on the dangers of working women, manpower spokespersons were constantly criticizing women for leaving the war industries at the slightest hint of war's end. The women's movement was as weak and silent as it had ever been in its history, and even the organized and outspoken female labor union members who dared to challenge the monolithic male establishment met with swift defeat. Why was the "fuss" over women's "proper"

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[64]Ibid., 293-94.

roles raging along as though females were participating in a wholesale revolution of values?

In May of 1947, the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* dedicated another issue to women, and in it historian Margaret Perry Bruton made a familiar observation:

> Virtually every magazine in the United States which deals with contemporary affairs has published at least one article during the past year on the woman question. Their ubiquity bears witness to the prevailing confusion in our society as to what woman's role is and should be, and to our acute concern with the problems growing out of this confusion.[65]

Bruton's article demonstrated much that accounted for the disquiet Americans were feeling. She listed a number of reasons for the confusion by and about women: economic, psychological, political, and sociological changes, all accelerated by the war; the cleavage of interest and aims between the intellectual women of the upper middle class and the working women (contributing to the unpopularity of the woman's movement); the great gap between the pattern of living for which girls were trained and the actual life experience which awaited them (prejudice and trivialization); and the discontinuity of women's lives (careers vs. child rearing). Besides these observations she also highlighted several additional factors which had not been seriously considered by the *Annals* contributors in the May 1929 issue. Society and feminists, Bruton believed:

> are forever saying that women are thus and so; whereas women are not all thus and so. There are as many kinds of women as there are men, and there is no one mold into which all can be comfortably fitted. A pattern of life which is entirely satisfying for one kind of woman may be torment for another. . . . Former generations smothered a girl's intellectual capacities; the feminists and most of her teachers today her emotional needs. Each woman must still learn for herself and often too late the necessity for managing somehow to

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[65]Margaret Perry Bruton, "Present-Day Thinking on the Woman Question," *The Annals* 251 (May 1947): 10.

> find outlets for her dual needs with the limitations imposed on her by society and by her biological function.[66]

Most women, Bruton insisted, would still choose marriage and motherhood over careers when their society cornered them with the dilemma, but, she added, that did not mean that the status quo was either "natural" or just. For instance, young mothers should be trained to understand that their present intensive job would not last and that they should be constantly building bridges out into the community. Women who did not prepare for life after their children left were:

> confronted in the forties with relative unemployment and the loneliness, frustration, and suffering which go with it. . . . "The sense of uselessness," says T. S. Huxley, "is the severest shock which our system can sustain." Yet countless women who are not fully employed in their homes are being gnawed by this very sense of uselessness.[67]

This was a far more compassionate perspective on the plight of the middle-aged housewife than what Philip Wylie offered. Bruton went on to point out that the situation was not much happier for the younger homemaker:

> In her role as wife and mother, a woman lives in a world whose values, goals, and rewards are largely intangible and whose reality has been undervalued in our materialistic society. As a member of an inferior out-group she accepts the masculine opinion that her activities are dull or trivial or silly . . . [yet] woman's sense of inferiority is heightened by her tendency to measure herself and her achievements by the standards and values of the masculine society outside the home.[68]

Despite the laudatory portrayals of housewifery and motherhood in the media of the time, Bruton continued, "there is no social recognition of her achievements, unless one wishes to count the hideously sentimental and commercial institution

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[66]Ibid., 10, 13-14.

[67]Ibid., 14.

[68]Ibid., 14-15.

of Mother's Day."[69] When women spoke of equality, it did not mean that they wanted to be men. Instead:

> the equality for which woman truly hungers today is equality of worth, of dignity. Once she were sure of that, she could cease being so self-conscious and might acquire more . . . poise and equanimity. . . . The present-day confusion about woman's proper place can be lessened only as both men and women learn to understand better her nature and her needs. It will be a step forward if we alter our perspective sufficiently to see that the woman problem is infinitely more complex than is generally admitted, and that it is part of a long process of development in which our men have been involved for centuries. We shall cease then to expect immediate solutions for final answers.[70]

This article, written only twenty-eight years after those in the 1929 issue of the *Annals* demonstrated that some women were taking large strides in the reevaluation of traditional mores. She was beginning to "put the pieces of the puzzle together," just as Peggy Terry said she did in her oral testimony to Studs Terkel.

Bruton's article appears in the same issue of the *Annals* in which Marynia Farnham repeated the message of her book, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex.*[71] Bruton did not openly criticize such a prominent and successful professional, but she still managed to convey the message that she did not agree with Farnham's conclusions. For instance, she enthusiastically praised the work of sociologist Viola Klein, who proposed that "the emancipation of women is really part of the centuries-long emergence from feudal society, in which men were driven from the home at an earlier stage by the growth of capitalism, but in which women have lagged behind."[72] Bruton concluded:

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[69]Ibid., 15.

[70]Ibid., 15-16.

[71]Marynia F. Farnham, "Battle Won and Lost," *The Annals* 251 (May 1947): 113-19.

[72]Bruton, 15.

> Perhaps there would be less moral indignation about the activities of woman if her attempts to become economically productive and to find adequate emotional outlets were thought of not as new and unfeminine but as an effort to resume for herself a place in society of which she has been increasingly deprived since the middle of the eighteenth century.[73]

The fact that Bruton's and Farnham's articles both appeared in the same publication said much about the times. Farnham represented those who clung to traditional absolutes, no matter how "modern" she might have felt she and the emerging field of psychology were. For example, she openly admitted that she mourned the loss of a "golden age," when "the Germanic tribes of Europe in particular, were physically healthy and free of inner conflicts." Farnham believed that it was these superior tribes' exposure to the corrupting influences of Graeco-Roman-Christian culture, and its false ideal of "progress" which had dragged civilization down and brought America to her sorry state.[74] Bruton, on the other hand, showed no inclination for lapsing into dreamy idealism, and appeared to have lost the conviction that traditional beliefs should be maintained no matter how much the world changed. Wylie, Waller, Strecker, Farnham, Lundberg, and Deutsch were merely renewing the ancient practice of portraying women in unabashedly negative ways. Bruton, who was probably influenced by the ideas of sociologist Viola Klein, chose to defy that traditional perspective. How many other women were beginning to revise their beliefs during the 1940s?

Klein's and Bruton's seeming break with traditional views of women was important because they may have been indicative of an unprecedented increase in dissenting opinion. There were countless reactionary pressures which may have been too overwhelming for the American female population to rebel against both

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[73]Ibid., 16.

[74]Lundberg and Farnham, 321, 328.

during the 1940s and later. However, more people, both "intellectual" and "common," may also have been quietly reevaluating traditional ideas about women and their "proper" roles.

CHAPTER VI

THE "IDLE WOMAN"

In her 1946 study, Viola Klein concluded that "most women still [could] not see how to pursue *both* family goals and achievement in a job," and many would choose to return to their traditional roles rather than challenge the status quo. However:

> It seems fairly certain that the independence and the social recognition which they enjoyed on account of their work, the self-respect which it inspired in them, and the greater social contacts which it involved, will have had a permanent influence on their attitudes and their character.[1]

Women, she continued, were in a state of transition, between the old traditional world and a new reality. "Woman's position at present is therefore rather ambivalent, which is typical of a state of transition."[2] Although there were those who maintained that women felt lost and confused by a lack of "purpose" in the new reality, Klein insisted that it was the reactionaries' calls for a return to the past which should be considered unrealistic:

> Once women have become fully-fledged individuals, a return to submission is impossible without an irreparable loss of human values. A remedy cannot be found in undoing the social development, but in attempting to find new adjustments to changed conditions, and to organize social life in a way which satisfies human needs--emotional no less than economic.[3]

Klein's open opposition to the negative, and widely disseminated,

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[1]Viola Klein, *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), xxi, 30.

[2]Ibid., 30-31.

[3]Ibid., 36.

commentaries on women was not an aberration. Others were questioning the justice of such hostile attacks. Abraham Myerson, a doctor of neurology and psychiatry, took pains in his book, *Speaking of Man,* to distance himself from psychiatric specialists who blamed women for all the world's problems:

> As our most fashionable scapegoat of the moment, we have Mom, the cause of all neuroses. . . . It has not the slightest basis in scientific proof . . . and it ignores all other economic, social and religious factors that work inexorably on any individual mother and her child. Without the slightest statistical or even logical proof with the twin fallacies of false selection and positive instance, one writer "proves" that all the soldiers who broke down in World War II did so because they were "their mothers' sons" and could not free themselves from mother love . . . reformers are haters, not because there is something to hate and some evils to combat; haters are such because of their miserable childhood; and the blame for frustrated childhood can be placed on the misdirected mother . . . Mom, poor mom! I put on my shining armor of skepticism and rise to defend her.[4]

In another commonly repeated complaint, Margaret B. Pickel, Dean of Women for Columbia University, upbraided women for their failure to succeed in the "man's" world of employment:

> [Women] will have to learn to be more professional and less personal in their jobs . . . they must accept the self-discipline that goes with it. They can overcome their natural handicaps. . . . less physical strength, lower fatigue point, and less stable nervous system. . . . only by working as well as the best man.[5]

The writer Edith Efron took exception to this argument, and replied in another article:

> Consciously or not, Miss Pickel acted as transmitter for the traditional masculine myths about women workers. She quoted male employers, male workers, male personnel officials to "prove" that women make less effective workers than men. And, using her masculine premises, she reached the

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[4]Abraham Myerson, "Woman, the Authorities' Scapegoat," in *Women Today: Their Conflicts, Their Frustrations and Their Fulfillments*, ed. Elizabeth Bragdon (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953), 301, 305-306.

[5]Margaret Barnard Pickel, "How Come No Jobs for Women?," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 January 1946, 47.

> startling conclusion that until women defeminize their business attitudes they will never be welcome on the pay-roll. As a woman worker with a strong sympathy for other women workers, I hold this doctrine suspect. The whole business of convincing women that men are instinctively, unalterably superior to them in every type of activity has been going on too long.[6]

As a U.A.W-C.I.O representative, Elizabeth Hawes defended women's right to retain their wartime jobs and gains, in an article entitled "Do Women Workers Get an Even Break?":

> All responsible people connected with industry today agree that women are equal to men as far as being able to do almost any industrial job goes. . . . But no working woman--industrial, white-collar, business or Government executive--labors under the delusion that any woman is actually, either socially or economically, equal to men in the United States in 1944. Equality is a high-sounding word, glibly bandied about by idealists, and often written into contracts and constitutions in the fond belief that words speak louder than actions. Too often the word "equality" serves only as a smoke screen for the continuance of gross inequities in practice.[7]

After this article appeared, an angry reader named Ann Maulsby wrote a letter of refutation to the editor:

> On a crosstown bus yesterday I overheard a conversation between two women which, added to an article by Elizabeth Hawes published in the *New York Times Magazine* several weeks ago makes me alarmed for the future of our men. I have in mind the appalling picture of a post-war United States of America in which there may not be enough jobs to go around, in which women may be fighting with men for possession of what jobs there are. . . . If the anonymous woman on the bus who said, "I have as much right to my job as my husband has to his, and by God, nobody's going to take it from me!" realized that a mass attitude of this sort may well unman the male and undermine his sense of security and subtract from him that fine self-confident I-am-a-man air that makes him such a desirable character to have around. . . . Let's face it; a man's very life is his job; he feels it is his reason for being.[8]

"We'll be keeping them men," Maulsby concluded, by summoning the woman's

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[6]Edith Efron, "A Woman Worker Defends Her Kind," *New York Times Magazine*, 31 March 1946, 22.

[7]Hawes, "Do Women Workers Get an Even Break?" 13.

[8]Ann Maulsby, "To Keep Them Men," *New York Times Magazine*, 11 February 1945, 22.

"superior adaptability which will make it possible for her to return to her home with good grace after she is no longer needed in the factory."[9] Two weeks later, another reader named Ruth Hinton wrote an indignant letter of her own:

> Women do not work for fun or glamour. They work for the same reason men do--because they have to support themselves and frequently dependents as well. In the post-war world this is going to be truer than ever before. There are going to be many widows with young children. . . . This same situation is found on a slightly higher economic level where the basic physical needs can be provided by the husband but where a wife with professional training can supply extras in the form of the best schools, colleges and camps for children and cultural advantages for all the family. . . . I can't believe that [the] much vaunted manliness is such a delicate, elusive quality that it cannot stand the strain of giving a woman a fair chance.[10]

Many thoughtful people were taking a new look at the plight of the older woman, who was not reaping all of the benefits that the traditional wife and mother was supposedly blessed with. Julietta Arthur addressed this subject in her book, *Jobs for Women Over Thirty-five:*

> To ask whether a woman of thirty-five or more needs a job is to beat a dead dog. Almost three million more women were family heads on V-E Day than when the 1940 Census was taken. . . . Of the 8,210,000 women who headed families in May, 1945--that is, as the chief breadwinners--5,970,000 were over thirty-five. To seek ways of earning a living when you are middle-aged and have no recent work experience, to be without training for a job, or to lack the necessary educational qualifications or the funds and time to acquire them, can be a frightening experience.[11]

In her book, Arthur attempted to convince older women that they did not need to panic or give in to despair. Women could support themselves; it was simply

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[9]Ibid.

[10]Ruth Hinton, response to "To Keep Them Men," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 February 1945, 12.

[11]Julietta K. Arthur, *Jobs for Women Over Thirty-five* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947), vii.

a matter of changing one's attitude.[12] Newspaperwoman and author, Zelda Popkin, wrote many similar articles which discussed the grim situations of women who found themselves alone and untrained for self-support after divorce or the death of a spouse. In an article for *Harper's Magazine* she asserted that:

> Too many [women] are reared on the fairy-tale--marry the dream prince and live happily ever after--but it cannot be ever after because of the cold, brutal fact that women live longer than men. This nation's widows must all be fed, housed and clothed and someone must meet that expense, either grown children, harassed by bills of their own, or relatives, through grudging doles, or the taxpayer. . . . Being human, they crave other things that are harder to come by, chiefly affection and human contacts, and far too often these are attained at the enormous price of the corrosion of the lives of their children.[13]

She continued by declaring that "the position in which they find themselves is in the cards for most married women," because "the little woman has never been really taught to stand on her feet, be a whole person, function as part of the world."[14] The language is harsh, but there was also a tone of genuine concern, so different from the angry, mocking criticisms found in Philip Wylie's diatribe. Rather than calling for the return to traditional values and "golden ages," Popkin's article pinpointed something entirely different--the justified need for a revolutionary change in traditional attitudes. "Marriage itself can be a walled city, narrowing the world, fencing a woman off from all of the other realities of life, leaving her justly confused and unready when, at middle age, that marriage is gone." Women should, she demanded, stop living male-centered

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[12]Ibid., vii, viii.

[13]Zelda Popkin, "Widows and the Perilous Years," in *Women Today: Their Conflicts, Their Frustrations, and Their Fulfillments*, ed. Elizabeth Bragdon (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953), 182.

[14]Ibid., 183-84.

lives, and consider their own needs for a change.[15]

Popkin's article indicated that the old criteria for the criticism of women was changing, slowly but perceptively. For even while reactionary commentaries were exhorting women to return to their traditional position of complete dependency, others were beginning to voice equally strong admonitions that such institutionalized helplessness was not good, either for women or society. In an article for the *Antioch Review,* Norma Bixler drew some ominous parallels between women's traditionally passive attitudes and behavior, and German women's acquiescence to the supposedly "masculine" superiority of Nazism.[16] She also stated that, "in the long view, women in America have moved erratically but steadily toward larger freedom and larger responsibility." Why not simply accept the fact, she reasoned, that they would continue to progress, and make plans for their future participation? Men needed women to contribute to the national well being, and not by the single act of raising children. It was not enough, Bixler said. She cautioned, however, that women should face this challenge without the usual unrealistic expectations. After all, "working for wages has not turned all men into sages. Working for wages will hardly fill all women with wisdom."[17]

Others felt even more alarmed by what they saw in American women as Elizabeth Hawes demonstrated in her own article to the *Antioch Review.* By the end of the war, Hawes' efforts to convince women workers of the need for

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[15]Ibid., 184-89.

[16]Norma Bixler, "Women Workers in the War," *Antioch Review* 5, Fall 1945, 368-69.

[17]Ibid., 370-72.

organization and concerted effort had met with little success, and she was losing her patience:

> There are about 54,000,000 females over 14 years of age, of whom about 19,000,000 are gainfully employed and 34,000,000 are living at someone else's expense--which, incidentally, is the definition of a parasite. . . . In my belief practically everyone is now of the conscious or unconscious opinion that a simple housewife who contributes nothing much but children to the society in which she lives is a social parasite. . . . A century ago it was still O.K. to be a simple housewife. Today it isn't.[18]

Traditionalists like Amram Scheinfeld sought to disarm such potentially disturbing ideas by crafting subtly revised versions of anti-feminist reasoning. "Women should not be considered inferior any longer," Scheinfeld announced, "only different from men." The female was endowed with very important "spiritual, moral and ethical values--which in the long run are perhaps the ones most needed for a happier mankind," he said. As the current terrible war illustrated, humankind had probably been giving "too much emphasis to what might be called masculine values--the striving for material progress, wealth, and power--and not enough to the values often regarded as feminine."[19] It is therefore vital, for the survival of mankind for women to protect and promote those special "feminine" qualities, and to avoid the lure of feminism which merely advocated "a weak imitation of masculinism."[20]

Another who employed this tactic was Lynn White, the President of Mills College in Oakland. In his book, *Educating Our Daughters,* he exhorted women's schools to "shake off their subservience to masculine values," in favor of a

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[18]Elizabeth Hawes, "The Woman Problem," *Antioch Review* 5, Spring 1945, 46, 48.

[19]Amram Scheinfeld, *Women and Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), 378-400.

[20]Ibid., 377, 400.

"distinctively feminine curriculum."[21] He said he had received letters from women graduates who complained that their "masculine" education had left them ill prepared for the duties of motherhood and housekeeping. He accused feminists of instigating this travesty through their insistence on women's right to the same same education that men received. What White proposed instead was that women should take courses oriented to their more "practical and earthy" sexual aptitudes. In an opening to his chapter on older women he acknowledged, however, that "to be useless is not good for the soul," and his solutions sounded less certain.[22] Far too often, after their sons and daughters had left home, many middle-aged women turned to bridge, gossip, shopping, clubs, and even alcohol, while their husbands were still busy working. This was "one of the most senseless wastes in American life," he declared. Women have wonderful, uniquely "feminine" qualities to offer, and the business world was only harmed by their lack of contribution. Therefore, businesses should be encouraged to accommodate most of these idle middle-aged women by providing more part-time jobs and flexible work schedules.[23]

It was possible that White sensed an increasing, and potentially powerful, counterforce building among the one segment of female society which was no longer susceptible to factors which promoted traditional conformity. Ancient arguments had played upon women's guilt by emphasizing that thoughts and actions which did

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[21]Chafe, *Paradox*, 180.

[22]Lynn White, "Fit and fifty," in *Women Today . . .*, ed. Elizabeth Bragdon, 194.

[23]Ibid., 197-99.

not place the well-being of husband and children first were "selfish" and "unnatural." However, by the 1940s, technological and medical progress had increased a woman's life span and eased her housekeeping duties, without producing alternate activities to occupy her time between the child rearing years and the day of her husband's retirement. By that time also, more "concerned citizens" and disillusioned social observers like Philip Wylie seemed increasingly discomfited by this apparent flaw in the infallible "truth" of traditional ideals. If a woman's unselfish devotion to "sacred" beliefs and behavior could lead to such unhappy ends, how long would it take for women of all ages to begin questioning the price of their self-sacrifice, and ultimately, the verity of outmoded beliefs? It seemed likely, from the disturbed and wildly conflicting media messages of the time, that most people felt *something* was wrong, but few knew exactly what it was or how to fix it.

In June of 1947, *Life* magazine ran a feature article on "The American Woman's Dilemma," in which Frances Levison recounted all of the books and articles being written about the failings of women, particularly Wylie's and Farnham's and Lundberg's books. "The impact of all these words has an inevitably disturbing effect on an average woman," she stated.[24] She rehashed the familiar list of contributing factors leading up to women's contemporary situation: the old rural home was extinct; schools had replaced women as their children's educators; men had no interest in their wive's lives or daily experiences, and divorce was "skyrocketing"; women had become too preoccupied or even obsessed about their personal appearance; women were displaced persons who had trouble adjusting--

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[24]"The American Woman's Dilemma," *Life* 22, 16 June 1947, 112.

they were unhappy.[25] At the same time, Levison added, women were being torn between two conflicting factions. They were:

> the feminists, who believe women are unhappy because they are still tied to the home, and the antifeminists, who believe women are unhappy because they have ventured too far from the home. . . . The antifeminists state that woman made her big mistake when she began to imitate man and made progress in the out-of-the-home working world . . . Feminists, of course believe women are lagging behind men, too slowly breaking out into the "real" world.[26]

Life provided profiles on four different life styles of modern American women. The first profile was on the "Career Woman," who was fulfilled and happy only when she had adequate child care. This section was accompanied by a heart-wrenching picture of a mother who was kneeling down to hug her small, sad-looking son. The little boy was returning the hug, but he had a disturbingly vacant expression, and another woman, presumably his babysitter, was reaching over as though to pull him away from his mother. The caption explained that he was boarded at another home twenty miles away while his mother worked in a doll factory, and that she was only able to be with him on the weekends.[27] Such a portrayal of the working mother, which could be found in all of the post-war women's magazines, was not conducive to positive images of working women.

On the other hand, this particular *Life* article is unusual because it did not counterpoise the "Housewife" as women's happiest and most fulfilling life role. Instead, it listed the many physically taxing chores a housewife performed, and pointed out that it would have cost her husband at least $10,000 a year to hire someone else to do them. This message was enhanced by a picture

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[25]Ibid., 114.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., 101.

of the housewife standing amidst a compilation of food, clothes, beds, and dishes, which went far in conveying a mentally depressing as well as pictorially graphic image of one year's worth of housework. The pictured housewife stated happily that she had absolutely no desire to work outside her home. *Life* added that "like most busy young housewives, however, she gives little thought to the future--to satisfactory ways of spending the important years after her children have grown up and left home."[28] This led into the most unhappy profile of the "Idle Woman."

> The Bureau of Labor Statistics lists 20 million women, nearly half of all adult female Americans, as essentially idle. They do not work on farms, nor are they aged and infirm. With not nearly enough to do, many of them are bored stiff.[29]

The photo prominently featured in this section showed an unattractive middle-aged woman with a vacuous expression on her face, slouching over a card table. The narration had nothing in the least sympathetic to say about the possible causes of such an unsatisfactory fate. Instead, there was a reference to the verdict of Farnham and Lundberg, which apparently satisfied *Life* as being the definitive statement on this "type" of woman and life style[30]

Finally, the fourth profile on the "Part Time Career Woman" was presented. Eight women, all well educated professionals or businesswomen, were pictured in attractive, pleasant photos, which emphasized the happy expressions on the faces of the satisfied part-timers. The article stressed that they contributed to, rather than leached off of, their society. Most importantly, they

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[28]Ibid., 104-107.

[29]Ibid., 108-109.

[30]Ibid.

never neglected their children, because their part-time occupations afforded them the flexibility they needed to meet their family responsibilities first. Once the children were raised, these women could simply continue to use and improve the skills and experience they had acquired during their part-time working career. They would be well-rounded, productive American citizens.[31] It was obvious which life style *Life* wished to promote as the most personally satisfying and socially beneficial.

Apparently, *Life* magazine's editors believed that a huge population of "Idle Women" posed a threat to America's well-being, and they seemed convinced that a solution must be found. In their conclusion, *Life* chose to feature the suggestions of the "successful mother-and-historian," Margaret Perry Bruton:"Still unrecognized are the results of the fact that a woman's life today usually falls into discontinuous sections. . . . The basic necessity is to prepare herself while living through one stage of her life for the one which is to follow."[32]

This concern for the "Idle" middle-aged woman only increased with the years. In her 1949 book, *Male and Female,* the anthropologist Margaret Mead bluntly stated the problem:

> However actively a married woman with small children takes responsibility for community work, still her life is centered in her time filled by, her home, but principally by the children. . . . It is all the harder for the mother of adolescent children when the break comes, when the children leave home for school or jobs and her task is over. Every social pressure to which she is subjected tells her that she should not spoil her children's lives, that she should let them lead their own lives, that she should make

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[31]Ibid., 110-11.

[32]Ibid., 116.

> them independent and self-sufficient. Yet the more faithfully she obeys these injunctions, the more she is working herself out of a job.[33]

To bolster her message, Mead invoked a powerful image:

> Some day, while she is still a young woman, she will have to face a breakfast-table with only one face across it, her husband's, and she will be alone, quite alone, in a home of her own. She is out of a job; her main justification, the work for which she "gave up everything," is gone.[34]

As the 1950s progressed, many social commentaries began to focus on a particular group of "idle" middle-aged women. During the early part of the decade, the writer Agnes Meyer warned that the times were too dangerous for such a waste of female potential and talent. Communism, she said, would conquer America, not militarily but mentally, by out-performing America in intellectual development. The educated middle-class was at fault since the working classes had enough work just to get by:

> Our society can no longer afford "the lady of leisure" who after all, is living at the expense of the working members of society. The fact that we have so many restless, unhappy middle-aged women should be a warning to the girls of today that they must plan their lives as carefully as any young man.[35]

There were some indications that women were beginning to express such concerns to their daughters, and their sons as well. On March 5, 1945, *Senior Scholastic Magazine* published the results of an Institute of Student Opinion poll, which asked 33,342 high school girls whether they thought girls should plan for a career other than homemaking. A resounding 88 percent said "yes," and

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[33]Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), 319.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Agnes Meyer, in *American Women: The Changing Image*, ed. Beverly Benner Cassara (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 13-14.

only 4 percent advocated planning only for homemaking careers.[36] In addition, 55.5 percent of the boys also felt that girls should have careers other than homemaking, while another 21 percent were undecided and only 23.5 percent were definitely opposed. When asked for their reasons for opposing alternate careers for women, the boys offered the traditional responses: "Woman's place is in the home"; "Indulging in other vocations results in too much confusion"; "Girls should stay in the home and not take jobs away from us--or from returning servicemen"; and, "Who will take care of the children?"[37] Overall, the editors of *Senior Scholastic* believed that:

> Many of the girls and some of the boys seemed uncertain of the future and took a practical point of view in advocating careers: "Girls should plan a career other than marriage, for many of us will not marry because of the 'man shortage,' and therefore will have to support ourselves." "If a girl does marry, there is always the possibility that something may happen to her husband and she may be stranded." After the war, there will probably be an economic crisis. In such an event, with girls having to work and jobs not too plentiful the girl who had foresight in planning a career will have a decided advantage over the girl who is untrained.[38]

This sounded similar to what Charlcia Neuman felt about her own daughter's well-being. Neuman was a passionate defender of the importance of the homemaking career, but she was also adamant about expanding her daughter's options:

> I always felt that if married women needed to work, then that was their choice. I felt with my own daughter that if she wanted to work, she should be trained to do something where she would be paid good money, not that type of physical work [in factories]. After I worked, I realized that if I had to work all the time, I would be very limited in what I could do. It's not that I couldn't learn to do something else. I think I would be capable of doing that. But with her, I told her there was no use spending her time and not really studying to do something that would be good. We talked of college as

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[36]"High School Girls Deny that 'Woman's Place is in the Home,'" *Senior Scholastic Magazine* 46, no. 5, 5 March 1945, 26.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

> just being part of what she would be doing. That way she kept through high school with the idea that she would go on to college.[39]

Neuman related proudly that her only daughter went on to become a psychologist, and she added that she eventually married, but did not have children. Neuman was happy that her daughter had the advantages that a good education afforded, and in retrospect believed that had she been given the same opportunity she would have made a very good teacher. Gluck said that while Neuman talked about these regrets, "she seemed almost embarrassed to fantasize about it, and laughed self-consciously."[40] Neuman felt *guilty* about her dreams of a life other than homemaking, but did not hesitates to encourage her daughter to have what she did not. Could Neuman's attitude be illustrative of how other wartime working women felt? Is it possible that many "Rosie the Riveters" realized there was an exciting world of possibilities "out there," but lacked the self-confidence to follow up on their new awareness? Their wartime experiences had also made them aware of their lack of preparation for that world. Most of the women in Sherna Gluck's representative group of former defense workers expressed a heart-felt regret over their lack of education, and all referred wistfully to activities or occupations they would pursue if they had it to do over again. Those with daughters actively encouraged them to acquire a good education. Some, like Marye Stumph, determinedly coaxed their daughters through high school, but were unable to talk them into going to college. However, Stumph added, her daughter did eventually become "a very good accountant."[41] To

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[39]Gluck, 169.

[40]Ibid., 170.

[41]Ibid., 66.

Gluck's surprise, the passive Stumph was particularly fond of her granddaughter Lynn, who defended working women and told her grandmother that "some of them have to get out in front there and push." Stumph told Gluck, "I realize that. If women are just too passive about it, they'll never achieve anything. Somebody has to be militant. . . ." However, as mentioned before, Stumph assured Gluck that she was not the militant "type."[42]

How many women war workers were the militant "type"? Open opposition to "sacred" traditional values and behavior required an immense amount of self-esteem, and confidence in the "rightness" of the rebellion. The realization that one was poorly educated may have inflicted otherwise strong and intelligent people with feelings of inferiority. Poorly educated people were not prepared to face the inevitable volleys of sophisticated arguments that a highly educated anti-feminist faction had been perfecting for decades.

The average "Rosie the Riveters" were not armed with the educational weapons they needed to launch a wholesale rebellion against the postwar conservative sentiment that favored traditional conformity. But would education alone have been enough to bolster their spirit of revolt? "Rosie's" college educated sisters were pushed out of their "male" jobs just as swiftly and efficiently as she was, and there were no indications that these women fought for their higher-status, higher-paying positions. Betty Friedan admitted that though she was a highly qualified college graduate, she was promptly bumped from her "male" job as a writer for a small labor news service, and replaced by a returning veteran after the war:

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[42]Ibid., 68.

> and it wasn't so easy to find another job I really liked. I filled out the applications for Time-Life researcher, which I'd always scorned before. All the girls I knew had jobs like that, but it was official policy that no matter how good, researchers, who were women, could never become writers or editors. They could write the whole article, but the men they were working with would always get the by-line as writer.[43]

Today it is difficult to imagine the co-founder of the 1960s Women's Movement accepting such injustices without a fight, but, she explained, "I was certainly not a feminist then--none of us were a bit interested in women's rights."[44] Once the "boys" returned from the war, American women seemed sincerely convinced that true happiness and fulfillment was obtainable only within marriage. Everyone Friedan knew was getting married, and she who had always been involved in "consciously radical" causes and pursuits, remembered that by 1949 she "was suddenly not interested in political meetings."[45] Instead she, and most other American women, became possessed by the desire for marriage and motherhood. During the 1940s and 1950s, women of all educational levels married and produced children at a faster rate than ever before. However, historian D'Ann Campbell pointed out, it was college women, and especially the younger ones, who set the records for the greatest proportional increases: "Once the influence of education is measured, the remaining effects of the race, husband's occupation, family income, and urban-rural residence on the birth rate increases proves quite small."[46] Therefore, Campbell concluded, "the best-educated women in America led the baby boom, and education served as the dominant factor influencing

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[43]Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1991), 7.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid., 8.

[46]Campbell, 94.

this tremendous increase."[47] The women most well equipped for a battle against established custom were least willing to do so.

Throughout the later 1940s and through the 1950s, the marriage and birth rates remained consistently high.[48] Women were also marrying younger, and the proportion of young women who considered four or five children an ideal number increased from 21 percent in 1943 to 30 percent in 1948 and 49 percent in 1955.[49] Eventually Friedan became convinced that the emphasis on motherhood was an unhealthy obsession for most women. By 1962 she was insisting that she, and most American women of that time, were under the spell of a "feminine mystique," which she described as an irrational and ultimately harmful compulsion to live up to an impossible idealization of feminine fulfillment.[50] Friedan further asserted that the pervasive media campaign, which "sold" the image of the "Happy Housewife," in order to sell washing machines and children's products, was primarily responsible for promoting the "mystique."[51] Later scholars disagreed. D'Ann Campbell concluded that women simply "wanted more than anything else to be wives and mothers."[52] Leila Rupp, believed that:

> The feminine mystique was no new creation, but simply the 1950s version of the traditional wife and mother. The postwar image of women did not have to

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[47]Ibid.

[48]Woloch, 541-42.

[49]Campbell, 94.

[50]Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1984), 33-68.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Campbell, 95.

> make tremendous adjustments. Rosie simply stepped out of her overalls, still wearing her apron underneath.[53]

Rupp argued that while popular images of women could be changed quickly, it was usually for pragmatic and not ideological reasons. This, she said, was clearly illustrated in the World War II labor recruitment campaigns. Basic ideas about women's proper sphere proved especially resistant to modification, and it would have required more than the four-year duration of the war to have effected permanent change.[54] Susan Hartmann concluded that rather than undermining the traditional image of women as self-sacrificing guardians of the hearth, the wartime situation only strengthened it. Wartime manpower campaigns repeatedly emphasized that women's participation in the labor force was universally accepted as an unselfish sacrifice for her fellow man and the "Amer- "American way of life."[55] The war fostered tremendous social change and insecurity and, Hartmann reasoned, people naturally grasped onto anything which reassured them of a sane social order. "Typically, the family seemed the one institution which most effectively could provide the rudder for this rapidly changing society."[56] Maureen Honey reached the same conclusion:

> The nuclear family came to represent the values of all Americans and was used as a symbol of unity. It also stood for the survival of decency and humanity in a world rent by suffering. . . . The desire for rest, tranquility, and comfort fed easily into the depiction of women in a traditional helping role, and they were idealized as healers who would salve men's wounds while

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[53]Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 175.

[54]Ibid., 174.

[55]Susan Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope . . .," 224.

[56]Ibid.

nurturing the generation that would harvest the rich fruit of postwar prosperity.[57]

As a result, women apparently dismissed any nontraditional aspirations they might have developed during their wartime working experiences and plunged into the traditional roles of wives and mothers. A 1957 study conducted by the National Manpower Council reported that by April 1956, "men had once again taken over jobs in 'masculine' fields that women occupied during the war. . . ." The majority of all employed women were once again bunched into more traditional "female" fields. Over one-third of all employed women were in secretarial, clerical and sales occupations, and nearly three-quarters were employed in industries which distributed goods or provided services.[58] During the late 1940s, and on through the 1950s, there was little to substantiate the claim that World War II marked a turning point in women's history. But then, Marjorie Rosen reminded, "something happened on the way to the sixties. The familial bubble burst."[59]

Specifically, Rosen was referring to the divorce rate, which by 1956 was one-fourth to one-third that of the total number of marriages. That meant that in the midst of the domestic 1950s, 2,000,000 married people were separated. In addition, Rosen added, another one-fifth to one-sixth of the couples still living together claimed they were not happy.[60] Did this factor directly affect

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[57]Honey, 215.

[58]*Womanpower*, National Manpower Council (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 61-63.

[59]Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1973), 261.

[60]Ibid.

women's decisions to take outside employment? Throughout the conservative, supposedly traditional 1950s, married women entered the labor force at an amazing rate. A 1957 National Manpower Council report emphasized that older women represented 22 percent of the female labor force in 1940, but comprised 37 percent in 1956. Between 1940 and 1955, married women aged thirty-five to forty-four and living with their husbands more than doubled their proportion of the female labor force, going from 16 percent to 34 percent. Among wives between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four, the proportion nearly tripled in the same period, increasing from 10 percent to 29 percent. The Manpower Council found this interesting, because these women constituted the only group that had not been in the work force all along.[61] Valerie Oppenheimer's study also disclosed that between 1951 and 1963, there was a 61 percent increase in the proportion of married women with children under six years of age in the labor force. During the same time, there was a 37 percent increase for married women with children between six and seventeen years of age, and a 21 percent increase for those with no children under eighteen.[62]

During the period between 1951 and 1963, the proportion of women in the labor force who had children under eighteen years of age increased from 28 to 38 percent, while the proportion of all women with children under eighteen only increased from 38 to 40 percent. Why were so many supposedly contented housewives flocking into the labor market? Oppenheimer asserted that these women were simply responding to the rapidly increasing demand for workers in the expanding white-collar and service sectors of the booming postwar economy. External

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[61] *Womanpower*, 129, 132.

[62] Oppenheimer, 15.

influences, not internal attitude changes, Oppenheimer said, were primarily responsible for the unprecedented increase in women's labor force participation.[63]

Oppenheimer admitted, however, that she could not explain the astounding increase in the participation rate among older married women who were from the middle- to upper middle-classes, but film historian Marjorie Rosen offered a theory.[64] During the 1940s, she said, film heroines such as Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Ginger Rogers, Rosalind Russell, Jean Arthur, Claudette Colbert and Ingrid Bergman portrayed strong, spirited and intelligent women. Though the story lines of most 1940s "women's" films usually included a male love interest, and a subsequent toning down of the female protagonists' aggressive nature, independent women were not depicted in overtly negative ways. Rosen noted that this suddenly changed after the war, and by 1949 the new "older woman" pictures began to appear: Olivia de Havilland in *Washington Square* (1949); Bette Davis in *All About Eve* (1950) and *The Star* (1952); Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Strip* (1950); Shirley Booth in *Come Back Little Sheba* (1952) and *Hot Spell* (1958); Joan Crawford in *Sudden Fear* (1952), *Torch Song* (1953), *Autumn Leaves* (1956) and *Female on the Beach* (1955). In addition, there were the Tennessee Williams plays: Gertrude Lawrence in *The Glass Menagerie* (1950) Vivien Leigh in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951); Anna Magnani in *The Rose Tattoo* (1955) and *The Fugitive Kind (1958); Katharine Hepburn in Suddenly Last Summer* (1959); and Geraldine

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[63]Ibid., 141-89.

[64]Ibid., 189.

Page in *Summer Smoke* (1961) and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962).[65]

The differences between these postwar films and their prewar and wartime precursors was striking, Rosen said. Within a matter of a few short years, film makers who had rarely failed to portray women's personal conflicts in a superficial manner were suddenly interested in the dilemmas of women facing middle-age. None of the postwar films had any hopeful perspectives to transmit to the middle-aged movie viewer, and the women characters depicted in the "older women" films were tragic. Sometimes the tragedy centered on the theme that the quality of women's lives faded along with their youth and beauty, and others emphasized the inevitable disastrous consequences of living vicariously through children. That Tennessee Williams "bothered to probe beneath the surface to pathetic paper-fragile feminine souls deserves a certain recognition," Rosen said, because his plays marked the first time that any male author was willing to portray women in truly insightful and complex ways.[66] But the fact remained, she added, that Williams and the film writers and makers only succeeded in creating, and perpetuating, sad and pessimistic portraits of women.

During World War II, the attacks on older women became louder and more negative. From Philip Wylie and Farnham and Lundberg, to the deeply depressing films of the 1950s and early 1960s, the persistent criticism of the "idle," and tragically fated middle-aged woman must have had an effect on women, of any age. For whether or not women were happy and fulfilled as busy young wives and mothers, there was always a voice of doom which hounded them about the approaching "darkness" of middle-age. If a woman was already middle-aged, there were

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[65]Rosen, 201, 204, 250-52, 255-56.

[66]Ibid., 256-57.

few places or persons she could turn to for ideas on how best to handle or even overcome her unhappy situation. Women's magazines were dedicated almost exclusively to the glorification and needs of consuming young housewives. Articles and sales pitches which dealt with the physical and emotional concerns of middle-aged women were not to be found in the best selling *Ladies Home Journal, Redbook, Good Housekeeping,* or *McCall's Magazine.*

Perhaps the dreaded anticipation of middle-age had more than a little to do with the fostering of "the problem that had no name," which Friedan discussed in *The Feminine Mystique:*

> the problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night--she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question--"Is this all?"[67]

Was this desperation caused as much by women's fear of the inevitable "horrors" of middle-age, as by the intellectually and emotionally stifling existence of the average housewife?

Finally, women such as Friedan had had enough of the negative perceptions on, and treatment of, females. Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* was an angry denunciation of what she considered an irrational and even hysterical postwar preoccupation with women's nurturing and homemaking roles. Friedan was in her late thirties when she began to write *The Feminine Mystique,* and was forty-one years old when it was published, but not all of the founders of the 1960s Women's Movement were middle-aged. They were women of all ages, with widely varying

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[67]Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 15.

family and socioeconomic backgrounds, but they were almost all college graduates, who had enough self-confidence to do what many women felt guilty simply thinking about.[68] The rest of the nation's women were seemingly conforming to traditional conceptions of the good wife and mother. However, by the late 1950's they were also divorcing at an escalating rate and entering the labor force in record numbers, and after 1960, the birth rate began to decline.[69] Even before *The Feminine Mystique* was published, women were slowly but perceptively beginning to alter patterns of behavior. Why? And what, if anything, did women's wartime experiences have to do with either this subtle change in women's behavior, or the radical changes in attitude which fostered the revived Women's Movement?

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[68]Marcia Cohen, *The Sisterhood: The Inside Story of the Women's Movement and the Leaders Who Made it Happen* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 53, 63, 79, 117-18.

[69]Woloch, 542-43.

CHAPTER VII

POSTWAR SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES

Among the numerous studies which have analyzed the factors that may have contributed to the increase in women's postwar employment rate, few have concluded that an unprecedented alteration in personal and public values was particularly responsible. Except for William Chafe, who claimed that women's wartime experiences in "male" jobs prompted a revolutionary change in traditional attitudes about women's "proper" roles, scholars tended to believe that women's decisions to enter employment were, instead, influenced by a variety of environmental factors. The booming postwar economy, which raised Americans' salaries, standards of living, and expectations for the future, was certainly important. So was the fact that the postwar economic transformation included a rapid expansion of the white-collar and service occupations which had long been accepted as "female" jobs.[1] Once the higher standard of living became accepted as an "essential" element of life, wives were further induced to supplement the family income when inflation began to erode the real value of their husband's earnings.[2] Scholars also concluded that the phenomenal increase in the number of older women entering employment could be explained. The birth rate decline during the depression years had, by the 1950s, decreased the pool of younger women who had been favored to fill the white-collar and service jobs that were

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[1]Oppenheimer, 141-89.

[2]Kessler-Harris, 302-303.

suddenly available. With this historical competition out of the way, and nothing to fear from male rivals who avoided traditional "women's" occupations, married and older women were increasingly accepted by employers as an alternate source of labor.[3] This was similar to the situation which drew these women into the labor force during the war, and such an argument offers a strong challenge to Chafe's theory. Chafe was willing to admit the importance of the environmental influences, but he insisted that his conclusion was primarily based upon an anomalous statistical finding:

> Significantly, the greatest growth in the female labor force took place among well-educated married women from families with moderate incomes. . . . Although before World War II married women workers had come almost exclusively from working-class families, by 1960 it was just as likely for a middle-class wife to be employed. . . . by 1964, a large proportion of wives worked when their husbands received from $7,500 to $10,000 (42 percent than when their spouses earned under $3,000 (37 percent), and by 1970, almost 60 percent of all nonfarm wives in families with incomes over $10,000 were employed.[4]

What was of particular interest to Chafe was the fact that an increasing number of working women were well-educated:

> Over 53 percent of female college graduates held jobs in 1962, in contrast to 36.2 percent of those with only a high-school diploma, and among women with more than five years of higher education, the employment figure was 70 percent. Wives with husbands in white-collar occupations sought jobs more frequently than those whose spouses worked in factories, and female workers in clerical positions showed a stronger commitment to stay in the labor force than women in industry.[5]

In short, Chafe said, the same well-educated, middle-class wives and mothers who were seemingly so willing to conform to the 1950s ideal of domesticity, may have also chosen to work for other than economic considerations. As a determining

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[3]Oppenheimer, 141-89.

[4]Chafe, *Paradox*, 188-89.

[5]Ibid., 189.

factor, education may have been more influential in wartime and postwar women's lives than scholars were willing to accept. For instance, there were some illuminating studies from the 1950s and early 1960s which demonstrated just how decisive a factor education could be when it came to national behavioral trends.

During the early 1950s, sociologists Eli Ginzberg and Douglas W. Bray supervised a study conducted by the Graduate School of Business of Columbia University. The object of this government-sponsored research was to determine why so many young American men were rejected by the military during world War II. In particular, the concerned government and academic communities wanted "to learn more about the numbers, characteristics, and residences of the young men who were rejected for service because of an inability to pass the mental tests."[6] Obviously, there were those who did not accept Dr. Edward Strecker's belief that "mom" was to blame.

Wartime induction statistics showed that of the 18 million men liable for military service, 5 million were rejected as unsuitable because of physical, emotional, mental, or moral disability. However, Ginzberg stated that the researchers' particular interest centered on "the 716,000 men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-seven who were not accepted . . . because they were adjudged to be 'mentally deficient.'"[7] First, the researchers reviewed the criteria that were used in determining "mental deficiency." They made the startling discovery that except for a small 4 percent of the men examined who were deemed "unable to meet minimum performance standards as worker and

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[6]Eli Ginzberg and Douglas W. Bray, *The Uneducated* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), ix-xv.

[7]Ibid., 40.

citizen because of a lack of intellectual capacity. . . ," the majority of these men had failed the "intelligence tests" because they could not read or write.[8] In this comprehensive study, the researchers went on to compare the rejection statistics by region and race, and found that "mental deficients" were conspicuously clustered in poor rural areas, where large populations of poverty-level Whites, African-Americans, Native-Americans, and Hispanics could be found. Non-English speaking French-Americans and Hispanics also had high rejection rates.[9] When the researchers went on to compare the rejection rates of the wealthier urban centers to those of the poor rural areas, they made the discovery that the larger towns and cities which had the highest educational expenditures were also the same areas which had the lowest rejection rates. It was the conclusion of the research team "that economics has much to do with the conditions underlying the World War II rejections and their alleviation, even though there are important non-economic factors at work."[10]

Shocking as it was for proud Americans to admit, pre-1950 illiteracy was more prevalent than most people realized. Ginzberg commented that:

> In a country that has long stressed the importance of public education as a foundation stone of personal and national development, and in a country that has had one of the highest standards of living in the world, the magnitude of the problem of the totally uneducated and the poorly educated is a striking phenomenon.[11]

After a careful analysis of all the data on rejections, the researchers concluded that the original number of 716,000 was too low. Out of the 18 million men liable

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[8]Ibid., 40-42.

[9]Ibid., 42-53.

[10]Ibid., 54-58.

[11]Ibid., 226.

for service, 1.5 million were rejected for reasons which could be traced to poor or non-existent educational experience.[12] Ginzberg added that:

> Although the experts in education had been aware of the existence of large numbers of individuals in the population whose ability to read, write, and reckon was totally non-existent or minimal, there had been no widespread concern with the problem of illiteracy in the prewar years.[13]

The reason, he surmised, was because the vast majority of illiterate people had somehow adjusted to the type of life one could maintain without the tools of literacy. For many years these people had been handling the responsibilities of employment, families and community activities. In 1940 there were approximately 4 million males in the work force who had less than five years of schooling, and it was probable that the vast majority of these men worked in the heavy industries that women entered during the war.[14] It was also likely that illiterate men were married to women who were no better educated, and who would have leaped at the chance to make good money in the war plants.

Firsthand accounts by the college educated women journalists and professionals who witnessed conditions in plants all over the country indicated that most of the women they worked with were poorly educated. Were these less educated women self-confident enough to turn their backs on tradition if their wartime working experiences inspired new perspectives? The evidence presented in a study conducted by Social Research, Inc., in the late 1950s did not support this idea. Magazine publishers had long found it beneficial to know as much as possible about their buying public, and sociologist Lee Rainwater was hired by

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[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., 39.

[14]Ibid., 38-39.

best selling MacFadden Publications to study the life styles, attitudes, and consuming habits of their working-class women readers.[15]

The study sample consisted of four hundred twenty working-class housewives in Chicago, Illinois; Louisville, Kentucky; Tacoma, Washington; and Trenton, New Jersey. In order to provide contrasting data, the researchers also interviewed one hundred twenty middle-class housewives in the same cities. During one phase of the testing, all of the women were shown pictures of people involved in various forms of activity and asked to describe what they believed was happening in each one. When the researchers compared the reactions of the working-class and middle-class women, they found some striking differences. For instance, in one picture all of the women were shown, a little girl was sitting alone in an outside doorway looking away from the viewer, and her face expressed no intense emotion. Interestingly, the working-class women projected themselves into the scene and became the little girl, and they supplied various stories which consistently emphasized the girl's lack of control over her destiny. Most envisioned sadness and helplessness, and described the girl as worried about what the future held. The middle-class women, on the other hand, were not as likely to project themselves into the action, and when they did, they usually envisioned situations which were light-hearted or controlled by the girl. For example, one woman said the girl was watching a little bird in the yard, and others believed that she was pondering a problem and deciding on a solution.[16]

When the working-class women offered descriptions which required

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[15]Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman and Gerald Handel, *Workingman's Wife: Her Personality, World and Life Style* (New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1959), xiii.

[16]Ibid., 46-47.

personal strength, it most often involved the quality of endurance, and not innovative thinking or behavior. The researchers believed the working-class women's "strong" answers presented a real paradox. "Toughing out" hardships took personal strength, they pointed out, but this same quality worked against righteous indignation and decisions to alter one's situation through rebellious action.[17] Also working against the working-class women's propensity to defy unjust situations was their fear of losing men's love. When they were shown pictures depicting men and women in various situations, working-class women almost always envisioned negative conflict and fear of potential loss and loneliness. In most cases, the working-class women showed a "great deal of anxiety about their acceptability to men, and a tendency to feel they must give in, or at least not respond assertively."[18] However, the majority of middle-class women described scenes in which the men and women were involved in cooperative activities of various sorts. Few of the women envisioned the men as dominant and controlling, and they were not as likely to express insecurity about men's love or life commitments.[19]

Rainwater summed up what he believed the test results indicated:

> A central characteristic of the working class wife is her underlying conviction that most significant action originates from the world external to herself rather than from within herself. For her, the world is largely unchangeable, a kind of massive, immovable apparatus that is simply there. While not all of these women think of themselves self-consciously as "little" people, a great many of them do and say so.[20]

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[17]Ibid., 55.

[18]Ibid., 69-75.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 44.

What they craved more than anything else, Rainwater asserted, was security, even at the risk of boring, unfulfilled lives. Yet, middle-class women seemed to possess a distinctly different set of values. Their outlook displayed a general optimism, a sense of self-esteem, and a belief that life could and should be improved upon.[21] Rainwater did not seem interested in whether or not the educational disparities between working-class and middle-class women had anything to do with their overall differences. But others found it particularly important.

During 1963, Eli Ginzberg investigated the attitudes and life styles of educated women. For his study he analyzed the returned questionnaires of three hundred eleven employed women who had attended graduate school at Columbia University between 1945 and 1951.[22] Of this group, 62 percent were between thirty-seven and forty-four years of age, 60 percent were married and living with husbands, 12 percent were widowed or divorced (though half had remarried), and 28 percent of those who were thirty-three years of age and older were single. A survey of the women's economic backgrounds revealed that 33 percent came from wealthy families whose fathers were employed as high-level business executives and professionals, 44 percent came from middle-income families whose fathers were employed in lower-level business and professional occupations, and 23 percent were from lower-income families where the fathers were employed in sales, clerical, craftsmen or farming occupations.[23] Of the two hundred twenty-three who

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[21]Ibid., 45-47.

[22]Eli Ginzberg, *Lifestyles of Educated Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 15-16.

[23]Ibid., 21, 25, 29.

were or had been married, 18 percent had no children, 14 percent had one child, 56 percent had two or three children, and 12 percent had four or more children. Twenty-five percent of the respondents' had family incomes of less than $10,000 a year, 55 percent had yearly incomes between $10,000 and $20,000, and 20 percent had family earnings of $20,000 or greater.[24]

Three-quarters of the respondents' mothers had worked at some time, and of these, 41 percent worked after marriage. When the researchers asked all three hundred eleven respondents about the influence their mothers' work experience had had on them, over 60 percent replied that their mothers' employment status had not effected their own career decisions, "or at least that they were not aware of any influence." Yet, two out of three of the 41 percent whose mother had worked after marriage reported that it had effected their career decisions. "Almost all saw the influence as positive: while they were growing up, they looked forward to emulating their mothers and combining home and work."[25] Those whose mothers had not worked after marriage "had relatively little to say about whether this influenced their own career plans, although a few sought to combine homemaking and a career because they wanted to avoid being like their mothers." When the women were asked about their motivation in seeking an education and employment, 43 percent of three hundred two respondents said they "enjoyed" their studies and had an interest in their field, but did not mention career objectives. Instead, most cited external forces as being the decisive element. Almost all of the women reported that their parents had encouraged or at least supported their educational and employment plans. In general, the researchers found that the women's parents

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[24]Ibid., 25, 29.

[25]Ibid., 29-30.

"wanted their children to receive at least as much education as they acquired, and preferably more."[26] This conclusion mirrored the results of an April 2, 1945 *Fortune Magazine* poll which showed that 73 percent of the men and women surveyed said they wanted their daughters to go on to college after their high school graduation.[27]

As with the results of Lee Rainwater's study, Eli Ginzberg's research strongly suggested that basic attitudes about women's traditional roles had *not* been changed during the war. For instance, Ginzberg pointed out that even though the majority of the well-educated women in his study were ambitious and spirited, they nonetheless chose fields of study and professions "they felt could be interrupted and then resumed again when one stayed home with children." All of the women believed that a husband's disapproval was still a "prime factor in a wife's decision to remain at home."[28] "In summary," Ginzberg asserted, "we find that only a small minority of our women were dissatisfied with the way in which their lives had unfolded. The majority had been able to realize their expectations and a significant number reported that their expectations had been exceeded."[29] This seemed to refute Chafe's argument that postwar women had undergone a change of heart and attitude about their "proper" roles. Or did it?

In a companion study report that was published soon after *Lifestyles of Educated Women,* Ginzberg gave the reader a closer look at twenty-six of the

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[26]Ibid., 30, 40.

[27]School of Public Affairs, Princeton University, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 9 (Summer 1945): 229.

[28]Ginzberg, 108-109, 120.

[29]Ibid., 143.

three hundred eleven women questioned in the original study sample.[30] While there was much in the women's personal stories which confirmed the argument that even these well-educated women were satisfied with traditional expectations, there were also indications of a growing bitterness. For example, Erica Olson, a professor of music and department chair at Drew University said:

> When I finished at Columbia I would have loved to have gone on and taught there as many of my male fellow students subsequently did. I was told I could not because I was a woman. This hurt me very much . . . I do feel deeply that sex segregation in our colleges, both of students and faculty, is as harmful to the total experience of the student as racial segregation is said to be.[31]

Cecile Tannenbaum, a lawyer for a city planning agency commented:

> I took this [job] in preference to a good offer from a private firm because I believe the government offers a better future for a woman. Most private firms won't allow a woman to do active litigation or to become a partner except in very narrow fields . . . if they hire her at all.[32]

Karen Frank was an ex-foreign service employee assigned to European and Asian embassies, who quit to take up teaching and writing because it was more compatible with marriage and motherhood. She felt that while she was in her former occupation:

> I met with prejudice (because of my sex) in every personnel office where I was interviewed, whether in the Department of State or later on in large industrial corporations. Many of them frankly admitted to me they felt that women have no place in big business or in big jobs.[33]

Frances Hazen, a lawyer who started her own practice after her children were all in school, believed that:

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[30]Eli Ginzberg and Alice M. Yohalem, *Educated American Women: Self-Portraits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), vii-x.

[31]Ibid., 22-23, 26.

[32]Ibid., 26-29.

[33]Ibid., 52-53.

> Women in practice of law have a disadvantage in the attitudes both of male attorneys who consider them interlopers and clients who evidence some lack of confidence in a female, particularly in areas of business and corporate law.[34]

Norma Allison, a full-time associate professor of biochemistry in a medical school, stated:

> "In my present job, I hear repeatedly about the wastefulness of admitting women to medical schools. The men drag out all kinds of statistics to show how few women doctors continue in medicine if they marry."[35]

Alexandra Jervis, a professor of classics said:

> The department in which I studied at Columbia told me outright that they expected I would settle for marriage rather than a career, and consequently they did nothing whatever to help me obtain a suitable teaching position. . . [and] though I taught as many hours, published as much, and received as many foundation grants and honors as men, my salary was always at the bottom for any particular rank.[36]

Despite these women's complaints, however, none of them came close to advocating a reform of the system which fostered the inequities. Instead, in their own lives they relied upon revised versions of traditional methods for solutions. Jervis went on to state that:

> Had I been totally dedicated to my career [not married] it is possible that I would have been accepted at full status. Early in my professional career, however, I knew I had to remain feminine in dress and manners rather than become the heavy-handed mannish type or even the faded tailored woman. Emphasis on the feminine has actually affected favorably my teaching and research, besides my personal life, obviously. . . . I don't compete with men in terms of teaching and research--I'm not a man. It is important for a woman to remain one in her work, especially where insight is required, and not to adopt a neutral gender or to pretend that her sex does not count. It does.[37]

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[34]Ibid., 83-86.

[35]Ibid., 136-41.

[36]Ibid., 64-65.

[37]Ibid., 65-66.

There was genuine uncertainty over the "rightness" of life styles which did not include marriage and children. Mary McLachlan worked in International Affairs as a section head for the government of Ottawa, Canada:

> I call working women like me [single, widow] "lay sisters." It's like being a guinea pig, but in the interest of what? Progress? It may be individual progress but at a price. I do not see any social progress, since socially, in the usual sense, career women are ignored (a more accurate term than "not accepted"). There is no slot for them. We are the "forgotten women." The term "bachelor girl" is ambiguous; one never hears "bachelor woman."[38]

In many ways these women presented a picture of confusion about their "proper" roles. Several felt that the inequities they had come up against were unfair, but they lacked the vital psychological foundation they needed to successfully overcome the barriers imposed by their environments. Only one woman in Ginzberg's test group saw this. Tamara Newberry, a history instructor at an Eastern women's college said that:

> the problems of emancipated American women have been far from solved. The middle-class prejudice, influenced by Freud and Dr. Spock, against women's working or leaving their children at all for anything has left women with a genuine dilemma . . . will they challenge the community's values, and work and suffer the accompanying guilt? . . . My generation (approaching 40) seems to me to be an in-between one: between the suffragette and the "trained brain" generation and the post-war "be well adjusted, nurse your baby and plan your life around him" generation . . . I know of no sensitive woman who hasn't some sense of guilt.[39]

However, Newberry did not think the situation was hopeless because:

> I do feel . . . that the climate of opinion is changing and has already changed somewhat . . . If I had daughters instead of sons, I should attempt . . . to advise them to finish college at least before marriage; to work or do some graduate study before having children; to marry men who would encourage their personal (and not just family) development; and to

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[38]Ibid., 87-91.

[39]Ibid., 141, 145-46.

> consider part-time work . . . so as not to burn out trying to work and have a happy family life.[40]

For women of both the working-class and the middle-class then, education, and a larger experience with the world outside the home, was increasingly viewed during the 1940s and the 1950s as new keys to personal success. This, more than anything else, may have been responsible for the revival of the Woman's Movement during the 1960s, for while women's successful experiences within the World War II defense plants did much to demystify the "men's" world of work in women's minds, it also gave them a glimpse of "what might have been" had they possessed the necessary educational tools. Many "Rosie's" who acquired a heightened awareness of their own shortcomings may have been further hindered by a lack of self-esteem. However, even if they did not respond to their wartime revelations through observable changes in their own behavior, that did not rule out the possibility that they actively encouraged their daughters to expand their life options, even if they were nontraditional.

In 1985, the U.S. Bureau of the Census collected statistics on the life patterns of 40.6 million women born between 1920 and 1954, who had been married at least once and had children. The data were analyzed by sociologists Louisa F. Miller and Arthur Norton, who reported that the evidence indicated women born during World War II, and immediately after, "were the pioneers, the first generation to step out of traditional roles for American women. They were the pace-setters for today's so-called 'modern' woman. . . ."[41]

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[40]Ibid., 146.

[41]Carol Kleiman, "First 'Modern' Women Were Born in '40's, Study Says," *San Jose Mercury News*, 14 October 1990, 2 (PC).

> It generally has been assumed that women born in the 1950s--the Baby Boomers--set in motion the work and family patterns associated with today's typical working woman. But the study shows that the seeds were planted by the previous generation, the women born during World War II, who grew up with Rosie the Riveter and whose mothers were involved in the war effort--even though Rosie and the mothers went back home when the war ended.[42]

The report went on to point out that "women born in the 1940s were in college during the 1960s, when the women's movement, the birth control pill and the sexual revolution enveloped the United States." The data for these women also follow the "now-familiar pattern of married women with good educations pouring into the labor market." When the demographers in the bureau's marriage and family statistics branch focused on basic stages of life such as the first marriage, birth of the first child, birth of the last child, divorce and employment, they found that:

> Married or divorced women born between 1920 and 1940 had children at an average rate between 3.2 and 3.4 births each. Women born in the early 1940s were the first to average fewer than three children: They had children at an average rate of 2.8 each. By the time women born from 1950 to 1954 started having children, the rate had dropped to 2.2.[43]

The report added that the years between first marriage and first birth also continued to increase for those born in 1940 or later, resulting in the latest pattern "of many women putting off having children to devote full attention to getting a good education and pursuing a career."[44]

Something affected the women born during the 1940s and after, and it was stronger than the messages they received from the popular media. No matter how prevalent the image of the "Happy Homemaker" was, it was not potent enough to

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid.

overpower whatever influences were compelling women to enter the labor force in droves. Even before the rise of the Women's Movement, married women's increasing willingness to leave their homes and children in order to work was transforming traditional patterns of thought and behavior. What happened? Was it only environmental influences, or did women undergo a quiet but revolutionary change in values?

CONCLUSION

By 1941, when the second World War began, the United States was still a nation comprised of middle- to small-sized towns, and rural areas: Many American citizens were not that far removed from their immigrant pasts. The vast majority were also under-educated. As late as 1945, only 20 percent of all Americans over twenty-five had finished high school. Yet in those prewar years, a man or woman could get a job, provide for themselves and their family, and still maintain a feeling of adequacy as a responsible citizen of society.[1] Given the tightly knit community systems of small towns and the additional constraints of cultural mores, the lack of education became an important factor in the maintenance of traditional beliefs and behaviors. People who were limited in knowledge of the world outside their communities were less likely to compare, question, and ultimately challenge social mores. Also, individuals whose whole world existed within their particular community were less likely to defy tradition and risk the anger of, or banishment from, that world.[2] Even the "big city," which was widely viewed as a leveler of people was still, in 1941, a composition of many smaller ethnic communities which strove to maintain their various cultural identities and values. Overall, first and second-generation immigrants consti-stituted more than half the population in twenty large cities.[3]

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[1]James P. Comer, "Child Development and Education," *Journal of Negro Education* 58, no. 2 (1989): 130.

[2]Ibid., 130-31; Polenberg, 34-35.

[3]Polenberg, 35.

Therefore, in 1941 the predominant social infrastructure in the United States consisted of a network of small, diverse, and tightly insulated communities, where traditional values were steadfastly maintained. Numerous sociological studies showed that the mental crisis fostered by the Great Depression only solidified the foundation the system rested upon. However, in four short years the second World War dismembered this huge infrastructure, and most historians and sociologists believed that the consequences were tremendous. The particular aim of this study was to determine whether those four years were long enough or disorienting enough to cause people to question, and then alter, their beliefs on "proper" gender roles.

The Depression was easing by the late 1930s, but a large portion of the population was still struggling to make ends meet. In 1939, a salary of $2,500 provided a comfortable living, but only 4.2 percent of all those in the labor force earned that much. When a public opinion poll asked people what they believed was a totally satisfactory income, more than 50 percent came up with figures below $2,500.[4] Many people were desperate, and the defense plants with their promises of high wages and a better future drew poor, under-educated people out of their various insulated communities. Considering the pragmatic nature of their decisions to take "men's" jobs, were these working-class women realistic candidates for radical ideological change? The bulk of the evidence surveyed does not support such a conclusion.

Nothing in the testimonies recorded by Sherna Gluck or Studs Terkel, or the firsthand witnessing of the various women professionals, the opinion polls or the various sociological studies of the 1950s supported the assertion that women's

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[4]Ibid., 18.

attitudes about traditional gender roles had been dramatically altered. Women still wanted marriage and children, and it was doubtful that they ever required the constant "warnings" of a potential social disintegration, or the persuasions of the exaggerated "Happy Homemaker" media campaign. Traditional values survived the wartime challenges intact, and working-class and middle-class women alike expressed doubts over philosophies and life-styles which threatened to blur gender distinctions.

Nonetheless, something ignited the fuse that led to the explosion of the 1960s. What was it? Foremost in the minds of historians and sociologists for many years were the obvious effects industrialization had on the diminution of women's traditional life tasks. The "American Dream" was founded upon the ideal of "progress," and "progress" made life easier for the housewife. However, it also failed to refill her increasingly unfettered life with equally meaningful and fulfilling occupations. Long before World War II, women must have shown signs of dissatisfaction with their lives, or there would not have been so much anxious discussion of the "woman problem" in the media. During the war, the media commentary turned to vicious denunciations of "idle," "economically dependent," "middle-aged parasites," and women were increasingly influenced to view their postchild rearing years with dread. "Progress" had also extended women's expected life span, and women were being constantly reminded that traditional housewifery did not prepare them for the harsh realities of modern life. When women were not sufficiently prepared to support themselves, the possibility of divorce or being widowed became an unavoidable worry. There were also the long years between the exit of children and a husband's retirement to face. No matter how happy or contented the housewife of the 1950s was, she was constantly reminded of the

depressing fate which awaited her, and her daughter, in the middle years.

Another important factor in "Rosie's" postwar life was the ultimate breakdown of the community's control over people's thinking and behavior. For the first time in many of the former warworker's lives, immediate social overseers were gone, and they did not mourn the loss in their various testimonies. Though most of the women seemed to have been indelibly marked by their guilt laden traditional upbringings, they also displayed an amazing determination to prevent their daughters from developing similar inhibitions. In fact, the women Gluck interviewed seemed especially anxious to insure that their daughters' lives were a dramatic improvement over their own. It is important to note that these women never hesitated to act upon the presumption that there was another happy, fulfilling life to be found beyond the walls of the home. They seemed just as convinced that a good education was essential in the attainment of these non-domestic pursuits.

William Chafe was correct in saying that World War II marked a turning point in American women's lives, but it was not the sort of change he had in mind. Based upon the available evidence, people's perceptions of gender roles were not dramatically disturbed, much less dislodged, by women's wartime working experiences in "men's" jobs. None of the women who either worked in these nontraditional occupations, or observed women laboring in "men's" jobs, ever suggested that their successful performances were motivated by a conscious desire to prove they were men's equals. Studies from the 1940s and 1950s consistently showed that economic considerations provided the strongest motivation, and in most cases, family need and not personal inclination was responsible for a housewife's decision to venture away from her home. Even when researchers such as Gluck

suspected that nontraditional desires played a much stronger role in some women's choices, those same women were still insistently claiming otherwise many years after the fact.

The important detectable change that the war experience brought about was the fact that while "Rosie" had a difficult time visualizing a radically different life for herself, she had absolutely no problem visualizing it for her daughter. That was a dramatic departure from traditional thought, because her active encouragement of nontraditional aspirations and behavior was unprecedented. Without the slightest intention of overturning the ancient system of gender specific social organization, these women forged a vital link to that end.

Even though it was solely pragmatic and temporary, the dropping of traditional barriers to the employment of older and married women during World War II gave women the opportunity they needed to try new roles, and explore the world of accomplishments and ideas outside the narrow confines of home and community walls. Women's unusual working experiences did not change their minds about the priority of marital and maternal responsibilities, but it did inspire women with ideas for avoiding the fearful traumas of the postchild rearing years. That led to a new appreciation for the value of education, and this factor should not be underestimated.

While it was true that the well-educated women seemed no less willing than their less-educated sisters to conform to the postwar trend toward reactionary traditionalism, such an outcome may have been more a demonstration of the power of environmental influences than the failure of individual confidence and desire for change. How were women of any educational level to defend innovative, nontraditional attitudes and behavior when the disturbing confusion of war

and depression years only caused people to cling all the more tightly to imaginary "golden ages" and soothing familiarity? After World War II, people needed time to recover from the psychologically distressing effects of three decades of national turbulence, but the 1950s were also a time of peace, and prosperity, and possibly as Betty Friedan illustrated, a reevaluation of those comfortable but restrictive traditional social beliefs. The revolutionary burst of energy which revived the sputtering Women's Movement of the 1960s did not magically materialize out of the supposed vacuum of the 1950s. Long years of silent disappointment and yearnings for "something more" must have preceded that release, and "Rosie's" daughters were among the first to realize that "something more."

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